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NEXUS

50¢

Because a man wants a woman
to play hard,
but still be soft.

baby

"I want
my wife
back!"

"I want
my life
back!"

Ms!

#FREEDOM, SISTERS

WOMANPOWER



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front cover—Marty Roelandt
photos 8, 18, 24, 25—Bob Zeid



Women Remaking Woman

SAVING THE WALTZ

by Ellen Marie Bissert

Zelda
 how can i be tightropewalking the corners of my life
 weeping
 thru the night for
 you
 you given the beauty
 i wanted
 for the pain
 inflicted randomly
 as proportions of muscle, bone & brain
 Zelda
 i want alley cats everywhere to cry all night for you
 we've your kind of body
 dripping away
 Alabama Zelda Alabama
 Zelda
 we are frustrated ballerinas
 our feet locked to the floor
 our legs flailing one against the other
relevé
plié
relevé ever
 the talisman is the *barre*
 where the body floats out on its sweat to the image
 in the dark mirror—
 small, brown & insignificant
 flying thru dawn

BREAKDOWN

by Ellen Marie Bissert

there is something funny
 about bleeding
 when you press
 a black window pane
 & whisper

fiction

Two Men Speak

Conscience Raising

by Ed Fogarty

I had a good thing goin' with Cindy 'til she got in tight with that bunch of Womens' Lib bulldaggers from Wright State, you know? *Cindy*. Yeah, *hell*, man, you know her if you see her. I had her in here a hunnerd times. Supervisor down at Third National. Keller's her last name. Wears glasses. Real nice tits and ass. *Yeah*, man, that's her. Was in here Christmas Eve and I think you danced with her a little bit.

Anyway, the bank got this program, you know, where they pay tuition for their people to go to college at night. So Cindy signed up for a couple nights a week in accounting or business or some shit like that, see? Mondays and Wednesdays, it was. I didn't mind because I like to get out 2-3 nights a week myself and shoot a little pool with the guys. Once in a while a couple of us make it over to Mom's on Linden and try to get a little strange, but mostly we just bullshit around in here or over to the Tom-Tom.

Yeah, man, *Mom's*. Ain't you ever been in there? Down near the soap factory. Go-go joint. Where old Raleigh got the clap off of that nigger chick last spring. He was really pissed, babe. Went over there afterwards and whipped her black ass *for real*. And her old man, too. Caught 'em in the parking lot.

Yeah. That was September when she started those classes, and I was kind of glad she did it. In her own way, Cindy's a smart little bitch. I mean, many's the night she'd sit around the apartment and just read 'til the TV went off the air. I never was much on books myself, but I can dig it if people like to read. I ain't got the time, you know? We workin' ten hours down at the shop now, and sometimes Saturdays.

After a couple weeks Cindy got to where she'd bring her homework out on the kitchen table and work on it after she done the supper dishes. Practice sets and ledgers and columns of figures and like that. She even charged a little calculator down at Rike's, man, so she could add up the numbers faster. She was gettin' *into* it. I mostly just watched the tube while she was doin' her homework.

Anyhow, things went on like that 5-6 weeks. Cindy was gone on Mondays and Wednesdays until 11 or 12, and I got to where I was closin' the bars pretty regular on the nights when she was at school. I'd recuperate on the even-number nights while she done her homework at the kitchen table and weekends we'd take in a flick or go dancin' at the Tailgate. Sundays she'd go over to her parents' and I'd lay around the apartment with the papers. Her parents never liked me much on account of they was good Catholics and they didn't think Cindy ought to be shacking up with a divorced guy.

Hey, you ready for another one? Where's Little Bit at? She got a *fine* little ass, ain't she, Jim? Look at her humped over that pool table over there. That's Danny she shootin' with. They shakin' at her place up over the Cliff Cab office. He's a dispatcher.

Hey, baby, when you get a chance bring us a couple more, willya? An' a double Kessler's for me. You want some hard stuff, Big Jim? OK, babe. Make 'at two double K's, willya, Little Bit?

So anyway after 5-6 weeks goin' out there, Cindy tells me she's gonna be gone Thursday nights, too. Something about conscience raising meetings. I asked her right away whether there was gonna be any young college studs at the meetings and she says no, strictly women. A kind of like club where they have a hen party once a week and bitch about how bad broads got it. Take turns meetin' at each others' house. I figured that's harmless enough, you know? It's like in the army. A little bitchin' is good for the soul.

Just after Cindy started goin' to those conscience meetings she started gettin' a little bitchy with me, but I didn't take it too serious on account of she usually always got that way when she was flaggin' it. Like, one night she called up down here cause I was a little late gettin' in. I wasn't here when she called, but Little Bit told me about it a couple days later. You better believe I let Cindy know *right now* not to be callin' around lookin' for me, that I'd be home when I got there. I mean, it ain't like we was *married*, man. See, you got to step on 'em right away. They all alike, you know? Give 'em an inch and they'll take a mile.

So anyway, last Thursday night is when the shit hit the fan. It was Cindy's turn to have the conscience raising at our place, so she ask me to stay gone until eleven or eleven-thirty and I said hell that's no problem so I come down here and shot pool

Joe

by Lee Huntington

I'm so tired, I feel like I just come. Only I haven't. They say that when you haven't had it in a while, you stop thinkin' about it so much, but I never stop thinkin' about it. I still think about it—all the time. I think about it when I dial the telephone. I think about it when I saw. Everything reminds me of it. I don't need to go to movies to think about it, or look at pictures. Dotting an i will do it. When I throw a wad in the wastebasket, I think about it, and when I brush my teeth. When I pull on the cigarette machine and when the pack comes down. I think about it with every bite I eat and when I wash the scraps down the drain. First thing in the morning, when I push in the alarm button, I think about it. And as I dress, leg into pants, foot into sock, sock into shoe, arm into sleeve. When I mount the bus and when it discharges me. As I watch the coffee fill my cup and I sharpen my pencils, I think about it. And when I come home at night and put my key in the lock, it's on my mind.

Is there any time I don't think about it? Well, sometimes when I wake up, I don't remember what I was dreaming. When I do remember, it's the same old nightmare of trying and trying to get someplace, and never getting there. I wake up desper-

a couple hours and then me and Leon went on over to Mom's. *Leon*, man. Skinny dude works at Delco. Likes to shoot nine ball.

Yeah. So at Mom's they got a couple new chicks dancin'. Real eatin' stuff, you know? And me and Leon was drinkin' doubles and these new chicks was sittin' with us in a booth and we all got pretty juiced up. Then I start runnin' out of money like you'll do on the night before payday so I left Leon sittin' there with both girls. That was a little after eleven, you know?

I got back to the apartment about eleven-thirty and the conscience group was all sitting around the kitchen table talkin' when I come in. Like I said, I was fairly shitfaced from all the doubles I drank at Mom's and I thought some of them looked at me kind of funny when Cindy introduced me to them. There was six or eight of 'em, and a couple of them was lesbun *for sure*, babe. Real *deep* voices, man. And no tits worth talkin' about. And all of 'em wearin' *pants*, for Chrissake. *Sickening*.

The leader of the group was this old broad name of Louise. She's *forty* if she's a day. Got this phony English accent. She look at me like I just come up out of a sewer or something, man. I felt like kicking her in the cunt, but I was tryin' to be polite so I just smiled at her and got a beer out of the icebox and went on in the living room and turned on the TV. The Channel 7 movie had just started.

So I'm sittin' on the couch inhalin' a Stroh's and watchin' the flick and gettin' a little more juiced, you know? And I could hear the conscience group out at the kitchen table talkin' about women writers and politicians and stuff. Old Louise read a

ate and sweating, but when I pull a Kleenex out of the box, I think about it again, and then I stop feeling the nightmare.

I didn't used to be like this. Before I found out, I was like the rest of the guys, always jokin' about it and boasting about how far we got last night. But the boys stopped talking about it, and I knew that it was because now they had something to talk about. Men don't boast about it to the other guys when it's really happenin' with someone they care about. So then I was really left out. I wasn't makin' it with anybody. I tried, believe me, I tried.

Now I know. The doctors say I'll never come. I wasn't born with the plumbing. Sometimes I wonder if that stuff is building up inside me everytime I think about it. Maybe someday it will come out my ears. Or I'll suffocate from it. Maybe I think about it so much because it's on my brain.

I've never told anybody about me, because I know they'd feel sorry for me. Not havin' a normal life and all. No wife or kids. Well, I don't want pity.

Every night I like to run. I set myself a goal of five miles, and I start off runnin'. I run as hard as I can. The feeling of speed is exciting. The sweat breaks out all over my body. My legs feel like machines pumpin' away. They start to feel like they don't belong to me. My feet go numb. My heart pounds so loud I can't hear my feet hit the ground. My arms get so cramped, they ache. My whole upper body concentrates on sucking air in and forcing it out, and my mouth gets dry and tinny tasting. I become dizzy. When I feel I'm like to die, I sprint for home. I go in and lie down on the bed, all sweaty with my heart racing, and I'm so tired, I feel like I just come. That is what it's supposed to feel like, isn't it?

paper about some broad name of Sylvia Paff or Path or something like that and says that Sylvia was a 'right on sister.' 'Right on sister' my ass. More likely a bulldagger with a *moustache*, man.

See, Jim, all women got a lot of the lesbun in 'em when they're born, and it don't take a hell of a lot to turn them around that way, you know? And I could tell by lookin' at that conscience group that it was mostly bulldaggers and if Cindy kept hangin' around with 'em she'd turn into one, too.

I went back to the icebox for another beer and kinda give 'em the bad eye but they didn't take the hint that it was gettin' late. In fact, the old broad kept given' me these real *snotty* looks, man, like I was an animal or something. It was after midnight by that time, but they didn't show no signs of breaking up. Just kept sittin' there talkin' about different 'right on sisters.' It like to made my stomach turn, man!

So I kept watchin' the flick and kinda listening to the conscience raising and first thing you know I start gettin' a little horny thinkin' about all the right on sisters naked and in a orgy, you know? A daisy chain, man! I always get horny when I drink a lot. Then I got to thinkin' about what a great piece of ass Cindy is and I start gettin' pissed about how them bulldaggers tryin' to spin her around and make a lesbun out of her. It's really a damn shame how they let those freaks run around loose.

So I went out to the kitchen and looked the old broad straight in the eye and says 'Do you mind breakin' it up now ladies? On account of Cindy got to cook my supper and it's gettin' late and I got to be at work at 6:48, you know?'

Old Louise got a shitty smile and looked over at Cindy. Cindy's face got red as fire and I knew she was pissed about what I'd said but hell, man, I said it courteous, you know?

Cindy says 'Well why didn't you eat out, Charles, you knew we were having our meeting here tonight.' She always called me 'Charles' when she was *really* pissed off.

So I start gettin' pissed myself and I says 'Goddammit Cindy whyn't you cut the shit and get the supper on the table so we could eat and get to bed? It's *late*, for Chrissake!'

Old Louise sighed real loud and started gettin' up to leave, but Cindy says 'No that's all right, Lou, just sit still because this is *my* apartment after all. Anybody leaves it's gonna be Charles.'

That *really* pissed me off, man, Cindy saying it was *her* apartment. I mean, I was buyin' the beer and the groceries and helpin' out with the utilities, you know?

So I lean across the table and backhand Cindy twice and her glasses fell off and broke and her nose start bleedin' a little bit. Louise jumped up and started callin' me everything but a white

man and sayin' that I was an animal belonged in a zoo and I kind of drew back my fist and told her to take her bulldagger sisters and get the fuck out or I was gonna flatten the whole goddam bunch of 'em. And I would've, too, man, they hadn't of left.

After they was gone Cindy put a cold towel on her nose til the bleeding stopped and then she cooked me up some sausage and eggs for my supper. She was pissed. Didn't say a goddamn word while I was eatin'. The old silent treatment.

I thought well fuck her. I figured I really done her a favor gettin' rid of those bulldaggers and she'd thank me for it someday. Then I went on to bed on account of having to be at work at 6:48. Cindy was still sittin' there with the cold towel on her nose, not sayin' a goddamn word.

I fell asleep fast and next thing I know there's this light shinin' in my face and somebody shakin' me and tellin' me to get up and get dressed. At first I thought the place was on *fire*, man, but that wasn't the case.

What happened was that that bitch Cindy had waited til I was asleep and then drove up and brought back a couple of wiseass Vandalia cops with her.

To make a long story short, they locked me up in their little nickel-ass jail the rest of the night. Then Friday morning that fatass Judge Hoffman socked me fifty and costs for disorderly conduct and told me it would be better for everybody if I kept out of Vandalia from now on.

That was OK with me because I didn't lose nothing in their halfass town noway. What pissed me off was the way Cindy turned against me and called the cops and made me miss a day's work.

So I had to call the shop and get Ed the foreman to come up and pay the fifty plus because I didn't have it with me, you know? *Embarrassing*, man!

Ed drove me back to the apartment and Cindy had all my stuff packed up in boxes and shopping bags and sittin' out in the hall with a note sayin' she didn't want to see me again.

I figured fuck her if she want to turn into a lesbun that's her business so I just loaded the shit in my car and drove down here and checked in at the Reid Hotel. It ain't too bad over there, you know it, Jim? And it's close to everything. If I'm gonna hang out down here I might as well live down here too, you know what I mean?

As far as Cindy's concerned, fuck her. She made her choice. There's plenty more broads where she come from.

Hey, Little Bit! Two more over here, willya? Ain't she got the *sweetest* little ass, Big Jim?

Shame Tries To Go Home

by Susan Scibetta

The electrologist brought the needle to the woman's chin, testing the length of cord. "The worst thing you could do," she began in the drone of a minister delivering a battered sermon, "is tweeze. Under no circumstances are you to tweeze the hairs any longer. You may clip them with manicure scissors if you must. But no tweezing. No shaving. No depilatories. Have you used a depilatory." She asked the question without rising inflection, as if it were another statement.

"No, not there," said the woman, "just up here," indicating her upper lip with her tongue. She thought of the pink paste that first cooled her skin and then set it on fire. The hairs that sometimes flaked off under the paste, and sometimes stubbornly didn't. The rotten-egg smell that the chemicals developed after a few weeks, sometimes getting so unpleasant she would throw away an almost-full bottle and buy a new one.

"Bad," said the electrologist. "Very bad. It will turn your upper lip to sandpaper."

"You have to do something," said the woman. "You can't just let it all show."

"Electrolysis," said the electrologist, as if she were pronouncing 'Jesus', "is the only permanent way. I think we're warmed up now." She motioned the woman to lie down. "I'll explain what I'm doing. Now, I'm inserting the needle into the hair follicle. Now, I'm turning on the current. Is that comfortable?"

The woman felt a tiny pin prick, followed by a burst of heat. "I guess it's all right."

"The amount of current one can stand varies from person to person. You may tell me if it becomes uncomfortable."

Another pin prick, another fiery splash.

"Of course the different areas are more or less sensitive. Upper lip is about the worst. And we always have trouble around the breasts. Stomach bothers some people. Do you have any on your breasts or stomach?"

"Yes," said the woman. Her mind ran back suddenly to the distant summer of trying on bikinis and finally surrendering to the grassy trail marching up her belly.

"We'll work them in," said the electrologist. "We'll move from spot to spot. You may as well get used to it. Get in the habit of thinking of your electrolysis as a long-term thing. Every week for fifteen minutes, or half an hour is they've come in heavy. We charge six dollars for a fifteen-minute treatment. Clearing an area can take anywhere from six or eight months to several years, depending on your individual cycle. Do you realize we have to treat each hair individually as it surfaces? Do you realize this cannot be an overnight thing?"

The woman stared before her. Off to the side, almost out of the range of her vision, an issue of *Mademoiselle* lay on a table. On the cover of the magazine, a girl in a bikini was flying

across sand. Her skin was like alabaster. She trailed a towel behind her like a disturbing thought. The model had a clear, direct, slightly defiant smile that made the woman think of her daughter, whom she had left this morning banging on a guitar and yowling like a cat. "After I've sealed off the roots, I go back and pull the dead hair out with tweezers. Sometimes the follicles are distorted. In that case we have to wait for the hair to grow back in and go after it again, two or even three times. Occasionally more. This is why the process takes so long. We have to keep waiting for your cycle."

She shot fire, tweezed, aimed and shot again.

"How often do you tweeze?"

"Every few days."

"Some of the women I treat have to tweeze twice a day. It took me two years to clear my sister's back. We might finish yoy by Christmas. That is not a reliable estimate since hair growth is such an individual matter. Please turn your head a little to the right."

The woman found herself staring at newspaper clippings on the wall. The largest began, "You Can Get Rid of Unwanted Facial Hair." Beside it, a grainy photograph showed the electrologist looking confused, with her magnifying glasses pushed crookedly back on her forehead. The woman was suddenly struck by the irrational conviction that the electrologist had been photographed without her awareness while very drunk. Another article was entitled, "K. Lesser Brings Relief to Many." A picture of a woman's face being treated was captioned, "They Groan, Wince, But Say It's Worth It." The face was grimacing.

"It hurts," said the woman without planning to speak.

"Yes," said the electrologist, "it hurts a little. But nothing a person can't stand. If they want to." She glanced at the woman. The woman's body gave a sudden tremor, a twitching of muscles, as if she had just been hit, or accused. The electrologist clicked off her machine. The refrigerator hum that the woman had not been aware of slowly disappeared.

There was a small silence, and the moment turned, but only went away.

"I guess I'll take it out of Household," said the woman.

"You haven't told your husband," said the electrologist.

Not her husband, not her daughter, not anyone. She shook her head. A sudden helpless yearning rose in her throat to save her daughter from untold dangers, from subtle lies, from many things. She remembered waking up this morning, like many recent mornings in the fog after drunkenness, corking upwards from a long way down. *Does my daughter wake up with a man? Does she make him treat her well?* She felt herself small, and her daughter doubly small, and both of them riding, huddled together, in some strange black ocean.

"Well," said the electrologist, peering at the woman's chin, "that's all we can reach right now. I gave you nineteen minutes, but that's all right. You had some real heavies there. Flag wavers. You won't be tweezing, will you?"

"No," said the woman. She climbed off the couch. She went to her purse slowly. When she saw the magazine cover, her body suddenly tingled a little with the feeling of being tossed high in the air, of spiraling and shouting as if in celebration of herself.

"Would you care for Dynamints," said the electrologist, taking the little box out of her smock. She snapped it open with a small ping. The woman sucked, and tasted flight in the sharp burst of peppermint that the two little squares set off in her mouth.



Sue Goode

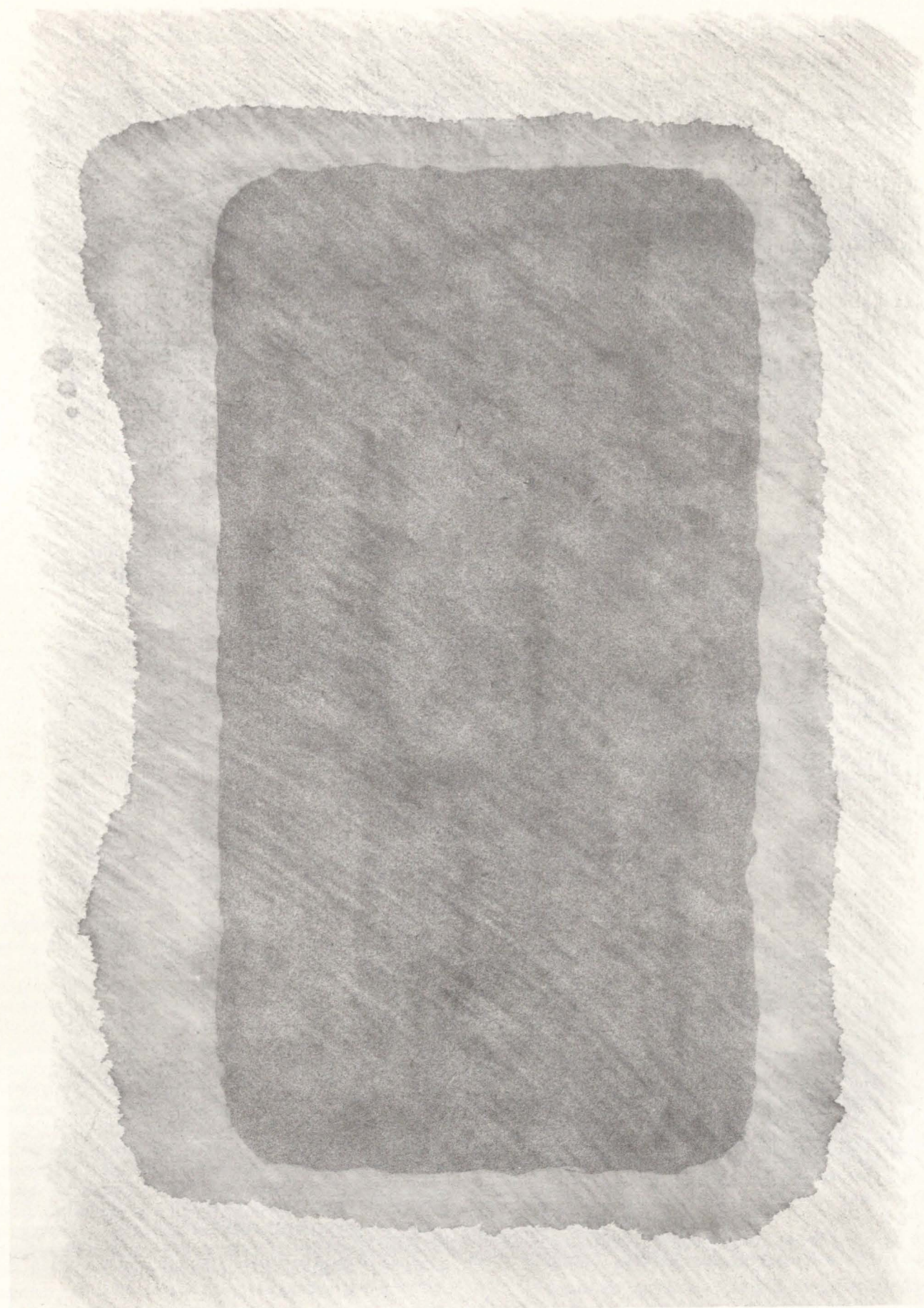
ARTIST'S STATEMENT

My work lately has dealt with an exploration of surface and texture. I am especially interested in the gestural mark characteristic of drawing, as opposed to the controlled surface obtained by the various printing media. Therefore, by combining both of these qualities on the same page I can play their differences against each other to obtain a more exciting surface.

My work is also involved with a sense of a shallow space. I deal with surfaces that are semi-transparent, using several layers which appear to be compressed and somewhat ambiguous as to their placement in space.

While I had first dealt with these qualities in drawing and printmaking, I am now attempting to adapt them to my painting.

GALLERY



Female Perceptions

Six Women Talk About Their Lives

Compiled by Joyce Hegenbarth

I learned a lot in interviewing these six women, I learned that there is no standard definition of feminism. I wouldn't call any of these women feminists and I wouldn't call any of them anti-feminist. They were pretty divided on the basic issues that affect women and this reflected a need to discuss that indicates recent self-examination. All seemed to be at a stage of questioning, exploring possibilities. One of the most interesting things I noticed was that the two women over fifty were more militant on the subject of equal rights than the younger ones.

I also learned a thing about people which I had always suspected, that everyone has a dream or passion that dominates them. With Lori it was horses, with Sharon, skating. Monica dreamed of writing, Roma of travel. Dawn loved sports and for Belva, it was Africa. It was exciting to see that all of the women had dreams for the future and were anxious to talk about them. If these sketches are any indication of the direction that women are taking in this decade, I can see a strength and determination about the present and a willingness to look ahead with infinite hope.

Monica

The day I talked with Monica, we met downtown for lunch and ended up in the furniture section of a large department store, sitting on a couch with a four-figure price tag. "You can pretend I'm interviewing you in your study," I said, and from then on it was easy. Monica loves to pretend. At fifty-eight she still has all her illusions and enjoys them. When she talks about art or literature her eyes shine and there are few subjects (including Persian rugs and European stencilling) that she hasn't studied up on. She defines her role as that of wife and mother and explains that the years she spent raising her two boys were, for her, very fulfilling and creative.

"I gave them everything I had, mentally and spiritually. We went for nature walks, even in the winter time. We picked out constellations in the sky together. I took them to the Art Institute. I treated them as adults. I never forced an opinion on them and always encouraged them to think and discover for themselves. And all the time and care I put into them, I see reflected now in the kind of men they are."

Monica is a slender honey-blonde with a musical voice and a charm and hospitality that seem almost southern, although she has always lived in the east or midwest. Before she was married she worked at two jobs. One she liked. The other, she didn't.

"When I first got out of school I got a job as a secretary to a certified public accountant and I could hardly stand it. The work was so boring and uncreative. Then I got a job at the Journal Herald. I was still a secretary, but I got to do some actual writing and the pace and feeling of the office was much more interesting."

She interrupted her career to take care of her family and later, when her sons were grown she took the job she holds now, a secretary in a junior high school. Although she loves the children and enjoys the work, she admits that there is something else she would rather be doing.

"The only thing I wish for is to be working at something I like more. What I really want to do is write. Several years ago I took a two year course in creative writing at Sinclair College. I think

those were the happiest two years of my life. For the first time I was among people who were like me, who loved what I loved. I felt at home."

She describes her writing as poetic prose. "I write short stories, mostly. Mood pieces. I don't care much about the plot or the action. I'm more interested in the beauty and feeling of the words."

She is hesitant on women's issues, explaining that she grew up with a dominating father and later assumed that it was correct for the husband to support his wife.

"If a woman is forced to make a living, then by all means she should have her rights. I've always competed with myself instead of with others so I don't know how it is. I think every woman should be able to do something besides take care of children or she will become dependent on them."

Monica will never have that problem. Her interests range from carpentry to practicing yoga. Her philosophy is very simple, "I think people should always look for beauty in everything."

Raise a Little Hell

Fighting Sex Discrimination

by Nancy G. Terrebonne

Suppose you know you've been discriminated against—you've been refused a job or a promotion or you've been fired from a job or denied equal pay—because of your sex. Suppose, for example, you discover, after being employed by an institution, that your pay and your benefits in no way compare with those of males employed at that institution doing the same work. Or you are told when you apply to work at an institution that, despite your excellent qualifications, they are seeking a man for the job. Or you find out that the institution where your husband works has a policy against hiring wives of employees. What can you do?

What I did was to file charges of sex discrimination, first with the local Affirmative Action Council, and when that failed to bring results, I filed again with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and also with the Ohio Civil Rights Commission. And I waited a long time for an investigation and eventually a decision from the Federal Government. It was worth the wait. The EEOC has determined that "there is reasonable cause to believe the charge is true." I am now awaiting conciliation and restitution and if that fails, probable legal action. I stand to gain, at the very least, back pay since the time the discrimination took place plus additional compensation or reinstatement in the institution.

My case is not unique. There are literally dozens of other women who are today having similar experiences in this country, and there are even more who have experienced or are experiencing sex discrimination but don't know what to do or what to expect. My purpose here is to help those of you who are in this situation to better understand what you are up against, what you can do, and what you are better off *not* to do.

First of all, I urge you to complain. Do make formal charges. Discrimination doesn't go away—it doesn't stop—unless you make a noise about it and continue to work against it. But expect for it to take a long time for your complaint to be recognized as legitimate and before you will see any positive results.

If this sounds discouraging, it isn't meant to be; it's simply a matter of making you see realistically what you're up against. You have to be very strong and very persistent; you have to believe in yourself, and you have to know what you are doing.

Sharon

Sharon is eighteen. After high school she got a job as a dental assistant and looked around for something better. She knew she didn't want college, but she wasn't satisfied where she was. Last January she took up ice skating. Now, six months later, it is difficult to get her to talk about anything else.

"When I'm on the ice, I have a mixture of feelings. At times I'm elated just to be there. Other times I try too hard and I struggle and become frustrated. Then maybe something will click and I can't make a mistake. A lot of people sit on the sidelines and watch while we're working out and they'll admire and ask questions. It's a thrill to know you're doing something well enough to impress people."

Sharon is small and blue-eyed, wearing aviator glasses and a short shag. She talks rapidly, gesturing all the time. She describes her skating as singles freestyle, which means that she works alone and that her routines include not only foot-

Your first step should be to familiarize yourself with the options you have and with what resources are available to you. Various women's organizations, such as NOW or WEAL or your local women's center should be able to offer you support and to give you information regarding what action you can take. If you are a member of a professional organization, such as the Modern Language Association, contact members of their women's organizations. (For the MLA, that's the Commission on the Status of Women and the Women's Caucus for Modern Languages.) If there is a local chapter of the AAUP, Committee W members may be able to advise you or to help you. The NEA and the OEA are also organizations that can give you both financial and legal assistance.

It is essential that you get legal advice. If you are short on money, call the Legal Aid Society, explain your situation, and they will refer you to an attorney. But don't expect others to know all the facts for you. Familiarize yourself with relevant laws. You can do this by writing for a free copy of *Higher Education Guidelines*, Executive Order #11246 (available from the Department of Health, Education and Welfare, Office for Civil Rights). Two other very useful and inexpensive pamphlets that I highly recommend are *Academic Women, Sex Discrimination and the Law* and *"Unladylike and Unprofessional": Academic Women and Academic Unions* (both printed by the MLA Commission on the Status of Women and available from them). Another free source of information is the Project on the Status and Education of Women based in Washington, D.C.

You also have to work to prove your case. You need to keep accurate records of what took place at what time and who said what to whom and who else was there to overhear it. You should keep copies of letters and memos, and it's a good idea to write down what was said immediately after each relevant conversation. Witnesses you will find are not always reliable. They tend to have lapses of memory rather than become involved in a controversy. You may be tempted to tape record conversations, but I don't advise this. I did it myself once in an attempt to prove the discrimination I'd been hearing for months. But I found that the act of tape recording itself so

work but jumps and spins as well. In the winter she works out for two and a half hours a day. She plans to compete for several years and then work in ice shows.

"The money is unbelievable. Janet Lynn is the highest paid woman athlete in America. Last year she got \$750,000. The only woman who came anywhere near that was Chris Evert and she only got \$251,000."

I asked her if she had any plans for marriage or children.

"I want to get married but not for a long time. It would interfere with my career and I want to devote my time entirely to skating for a while. After I've finished with ice shows I may want to retire and teach somewhere and then I might get married. But as long as I'm travelling, there wouldn't be much point to it. As for children, no. They would take too much time that I want to spend on other things. I think children impede marital growth. A couple begins to center everything around their children and pretty soon they have nothing to say to each other."

Sharon is suspicious of the Equal Rights Amendment be-

alienated others that no one would even listen to the substance of what was said.

Of course, it helps to have friends. Unfortunately, you're likely to find that no one likes you—or almost no one—when you start complaining about discrimination. People who didn't even know you beforehand, and who know very little about your case or the reasons for your charges, will openly condemn you. Others, you will find, who were formerly friendly, will disassociate themselves from you. One woman I knew even asked me to write a letter to her superiors disavowing that I had ever been friendly with her. I was only too glad to do so.

You can expect, too, that your husband, if you have one, will be harassed. He is likely to be ostracized by his peers and his fellow workers; he may be passed over for a raise or a promotion; he may even lose his job.

There are, on the other hand, many supportive women's groups, and you will find that even total strangers will sympathize with your cause and will give you much needed moral support. If what you want is publicity, and often that's very good in terms of provoking action in your case, you can enlist the press. I warn you, however, that too much adverse publicity can be more damaging than helpful to you; you will be labeled a malicious crank, an aggressive woman, and a troublemaker.

Most important it is helpful to remain cool—at least outwardly—when confronting your opposition. This is of course very difficult to do in such an emotionally charged situation. It is easier, however, if you have support from others, if you have clearly in mind what you want and why you are bringing charges and what you expect to gain from doing so.

You will find that fighting discrimination is not just an ego trip, not just a matter of getting revenge, although certainly that is part of it. It is a way to effect real change in the system, a way to help put an end to practices that hurt many thousands of people—practices that are really evil. I have learned much from my experiences with discrimination, and despite my many frustrations and my long wait,—I am prepared to fight again and to continue to fight as long as it is necessary. It's a good feeling to know you have fought and won.

cause some of the implications of it frighten her.

"I don't want to be drafted. I don't want to do heavy labor. On the other hand, I do think women should be paid like men."

Unlike Monica, Sharon sees quite a few differences between men and women.

"There are obvious physical differences. Men have a greater capacity to build their bodies. They're stronger. But emotionally, I think they're inferior. They're more childish than women. They can't be satisfied with anything for long and they just aren't as trustworthy. I think women can be just as intelligent as men but they tend not to develop it. Women, as a rule, just aren't as ambitious as men."

Sharon is preparing now for her first skating examination. After she has taken three such tests, she will be eligible for competition. If she passes eight examinations she will qualify for the Olympics. At this point Sharon has no doubts that she can make it all the way.

Belva

Belva, 24, is a full-time reporter for a Dayton newspaper. She takes her work and everything else she does very seriously. Being with her, one gets the impression of constant activity. We sat at her desk in the newsroom and she talked very rapidly, using her eyes for punctuation and gesturing often. She defines herself as a black woman with the emphasis on black.

"I have a certain commitment to my people because everything I say or do is a reflection on the group to which I belong."

I asked her if, like some other black women, she had trouble calling herself a feminist.

"I don't see that the two things should conflict. I feel oppression as a black woman. And I have to fight oppression of any kind. I think sexism is a more individual problem than racism. If I see that a man is being sexist, I correct him. But racism is more a societal problem. The essence of both is to find respect. If you respect human beings, you don't have to worry."

For Belva, this respect extends into all areas of life. She practices vegetarianism because of a deep sensitivity toward animals. She also respects her job.

"I might find something else just as rewarding or I might stay with it. But one thing I'm sure about is that while I'm a journalist I want to be a damn good journalist and if I leave it, I want to leave better than I came."

The biggest surprise of the interview came when I innocently asked if Belva intended to stay in Dayton. She told me she wanted to live in Africa.

"If you're black you can't help having a feeling for your heritage and your roots. Africa is home for me and this country is just a foster home. I'm not saying all black people should go back. You don't have to be a vegetarian to love animals. But being black involves an emotional feeling for that continent."

When she talks about Africa, her eyes take on a special expression. She speaks almost poetically about giving the continent something of herself.

"There are no stereotypes or generalizations when you talk about land. That's what it is to me, just beautiful land."

Belva hopes to be married someday because she considers the family essential to black unity.

"A family gives you a source of strength and support. A home is a place to rest and get encouragement. Then that unit extends to form a strong black community."

She supports the ERA as progressive legislation but is doubtful that its effect on society will be great.

"I think it's useless to pass laws forcing people to think certain ways. I don't think society is ready for equal rights for anybody. Coming from a black perspective, I've seen that you can't legislate equality."

Finally I asked her about job discrimination. I asked her if she felt she was discriminated against either because of being black or being a woman.

"Let me put it this way. Every job has its discrimination. It's never specific, usually just an attitude. I don't spend my time analyzing it or worrying about it. You can't do that. You just have to deal with it and go on from there."

Roma

Roma is fifty-eight, a widow for twenty years and a determined nonconformist. She sat in a leather chair in her living room under a Picasso print, twisted her bangs and talked longingly of living in England. She defined herself as a widow, or at least admitted that that was how she explained herself to others, so we began by talking about the experience of widowhood. She speaks very calmly and objectively about the tragedy and has obviously refused to be defeated by it.

"The first feeling you have is that you're thunderstruck. My husband's death came as a complete shock to me. All the doctors had assured me his condition was not serious. The first night was the worst. It was like a nightmare. I had no idea what to do about the funeral arrangements and all the legal procedures. After that, everything was a blur while I went through all the red tape and kept telling the story over and over to this relative and that. At first everyone is very sympathetic. Then they lose interest and drift away. So for a while I felt very sorry for myself. Then I gradually began to see that constant grief can be very boring. I was even boring myself. So I threw myself into other things, my little girl, reading, my job and so forth. As my daughter got older she became a good friend and that helped a lot."

Roma works as a correspondent in the accounts payable department of a large Dayton store. She enjoys her work, but it is not the focus of her life. Her interests are varied. She collects art (from what I could tell, there was at least one Utrillo in every room of the house), she reads English history, science fiction, architecture manuals and handbooks for identifying birds. She knows opera back and forth and is interested in the space program. But her deepest love is travel.

"My most wonderful memory is the summer my daughter and I went to England for the first time. The crumbling old buildings, the cathedrals and ruins, all of these affect me very deeply. We went in '69 and again in '73 and when I retire, I want to go back to England and live for a year, haunting the libraries and the old buildings."

Roma favors the Equal Rights Amendment, having seen first hand how a woman alone needs all the help she can get. Her ideas about the feminist movement, she admits, have changed.

"I used to think it was a lot of radicals, but now I can see that most of the things they say are true. It's time women got at it and won their rights and if they don't, they're stupid."

I asked her if she thought that men were better suited to some kinds of work than women.

"There are so many careers, it's hard to make a blanket

statement. Strong women might be able to do heavy labor better than some men. The only thing I can think of that I wouldn't like to see a woman do is play professional football. Come to think of it, I don't like to see men doing it either."

Roma seems to value freedom and independence above all else. She looks forward to retirement as a time when she can come and go just as she pleases.

"And I'll have my suitcase packed all the time."

Lori

Lori is a single-minded interviewee, determined not to be misquoted or led. She knows exactly how she feels on any given subject, and if she has no particular feeling, she shows her disinterest in no uncertain terms. As for being asked abstract questions about her role in society, she dismisses that with no trouble at all.

"I'm a person. What do you want me to say?"

One thing she does talk about, the dominating passion of her life, is a white, purebred quarterhorse named Willie. Lori has owned Willie for over a year now and admits that horses have a certain almost mystical fascination for her.

"I know a lot of people don't understand why some people love horses. But if you could be on a horse at seven a.m. when the dew is still on the grass and ride through the trees down to the water where everything is so quiet that all you can hear is your horse breathing, not like the sound of an engine, but like a living thing and you realize you're part of that living thing and you become part of everything around you. You learn to communicate with your animal without words. It's really beautiful."

Lori is nineteen. She works at a stable north of Dayton, taking riders out on the trails. Her Indian blood shows in her long brown hair and dark eyes and cheekbones. She is completely honest. The day I talked to her she said she was a little tired. She had apparently pitched hay all morning in the ninety degree heat. "But it's all right, they let us rest every hour." She is very committed to ecology, currently battling an ordinance that would open up the wildlife reserve where she works to tourists and their cars.

"That's the trouble with Americans. They have to do everything in their little cars. They won't give up a little bit of convenience to make things better. There's no reason they couldn't run a monorail through the park. Or a nice, quiet electric bus. Some people's minds are so closed, they don't know how to enjoy or experience anything. They come to the stable with forty-five minutes of their schedule for enjoying nature. They ride up the trail and down the trail and jump in their cars and go back into traffic. It's ridiculous."

On women's issues Lori is paradoxical. She does not favor ERA because she says women can't do heavy labor. When I reminded her of her hay-pitching she replied, "That isn't anything." As for herself she hopes to combine a career in either veterinary science or horse breeding with marriage and says she will probably have one child "for the experience." I asked her about hobbies.

"Oil painting. Art in general. I like to write, at least I try. I like hobbies that get me inside myself. I hate mechanical things. Cars frighten me which is another reason I like horses. I'd really like to go back to the American old west. They had close families, small communities and people worked very hard. I guess I just don't have much use for civilization."

Dawn

I chose to interview Dawn because two of my interviews were from the "older generation" and three from the younger. But to find out what effect the women's movement was really having, I thought it would be a good idea to find someone who had grown up with it. Dawn is thirteen. She is an athlete and an animal lover, and she has figured out most of her future. Her home life is busy, to say the least. She lives with two sisters, a brother, two dogs and a cat. She sat on a couch in her livingroom while assorted members of the family ran in and out and a thunderstorm raged outside. Dawn didn't seem to notice. We talked about sports.

"Sometimes I wish I was a boy so I could be in more sports. The school pays more attention to boy's sports. But one good thing we have is GAA. (Girl's Athletic Association) They sponsor volleyball, baseball, tennis and track. I like track about the best. Last year I came in fourth in the track competition but I set a record for our school. I'm also on the volleyball team and I love basketball, too."

That's not all. She is also first baseman for the local girl's softball team. I asked her what she thought of the idea of coed gym classes.

"I wouldn't like it. The guys would try to make us nervous. They'd probably tackle us and cream us at basketball and stuff."

She feels that men are probably stronger than women but that mentally the sexes are about equal. She favors the ERA and is pretty sure that women are discriminated against.

"I think sometimes women try to get jobs and they get told they're underqualified but really the problem is that they're women."

Dawn seems to have her life pretty well under control. Besides sports she plays the cornet, collects both coins and stamps and is an active member of Rainbow. When she gets out of college she wants to become a veterinarian and move to the country where she can raise animals. She also has a boyfriend.

"Yes, I'm going with a guy but I can't date until next year. And then it has to be double dating."

I asked her if she found it easy to get along with the guys her age.

"It's hard to talk to them. You get embarrassed. I'm used to girls because I grew up playing with them. Girls are always friends with girls and guys are always friends with guys so it's hard to communicate, at first."

At this point, Dawn feels that the most important thing in her life is her family and one of her favorite things to do is go camping with them.

"I love to be out in the country away from all the cars and stuff. It gets so boring in the city. When I'm on my own I want to have a big place in the country with woods, where I could keep horses and dogs."

At thirteen, Dawn has few complaints. She is upset by society's cruelty to animals and hopes to be able to help correct that problem some day. And she wishes her mother would let her wear pants more often instead of dresses. But basically, as long as she can participate in sports and get out into the country once in a while, she feels that life is pretty good to her.

DEATH ROW

by Coral Barberini

I keep waiting for the end to come
on death row sit cereal boxes, peanut butter-jellied knives
a single coffee cup
I'm condemned for breaking his
spilling dark brown drops with
"I don't want to live with you anymore"
celled now with my daughters' raspberry koolaid clown smiles
gouda cheese and sweet sangria my bread and water

I committed the ultimate crime
the homewrecker forked her plate and said
"I want a divorce"
after eight months he filled cardboard boxes, stuffed the small truck
and left
and now I keep waiting for the end to come

Their voices tell me it'll strike one day
the guillotine gleam will sever my crazy head
avenge affronted patriarchs
spill my ladyblood
while I study my bright eyes in the mirror
catching brilliant topaz beams
the tireless insects their mouths spout scurry about my cell sputtering
"You need a man"
"A woman just can't make it on her own"
the roaches and spiders spitting
"You've fucked up your life Baby"
but bugs don't frighten me

On death row daydreams remember his yells
"Bitch. You're brutal, incapable of love"
because I stopped giving him what he wanted
I started "What do I want?"
my thundering birthvoice
a shrill sudden cry
with his fingers choking tighter my neck
"You belong to me"
my birthvoice blasted
"Bloodsucker. All my blood can't give you life. Let me go"
and now I keep waiting for the end to come

Death row solitaire
now I marvel at my self closeness
and see my daughters, a sapphire, a ruby
such treasure in our touching
"I love you Mommy"
"I love you too"
bursts of golden joy gems fill death row
I glow
seeing clearly
adoring sweet stunning me
I shine formless free

And I keep waiting for the end to come
knowing this is my beginning

UNTITLED

by Kathleen Charnak

as you button & zip yourself
back together & replace your
private parts back in their
public places
our intimacy

- i. comb goes to left hip pocket
gradually flowers
- ii. wallet in the right
in splendid ritualistic fashion
- iii. shirttail tucked in
until you place me back
in my tupperware bowl &
gently (but firmly) lock
the top.

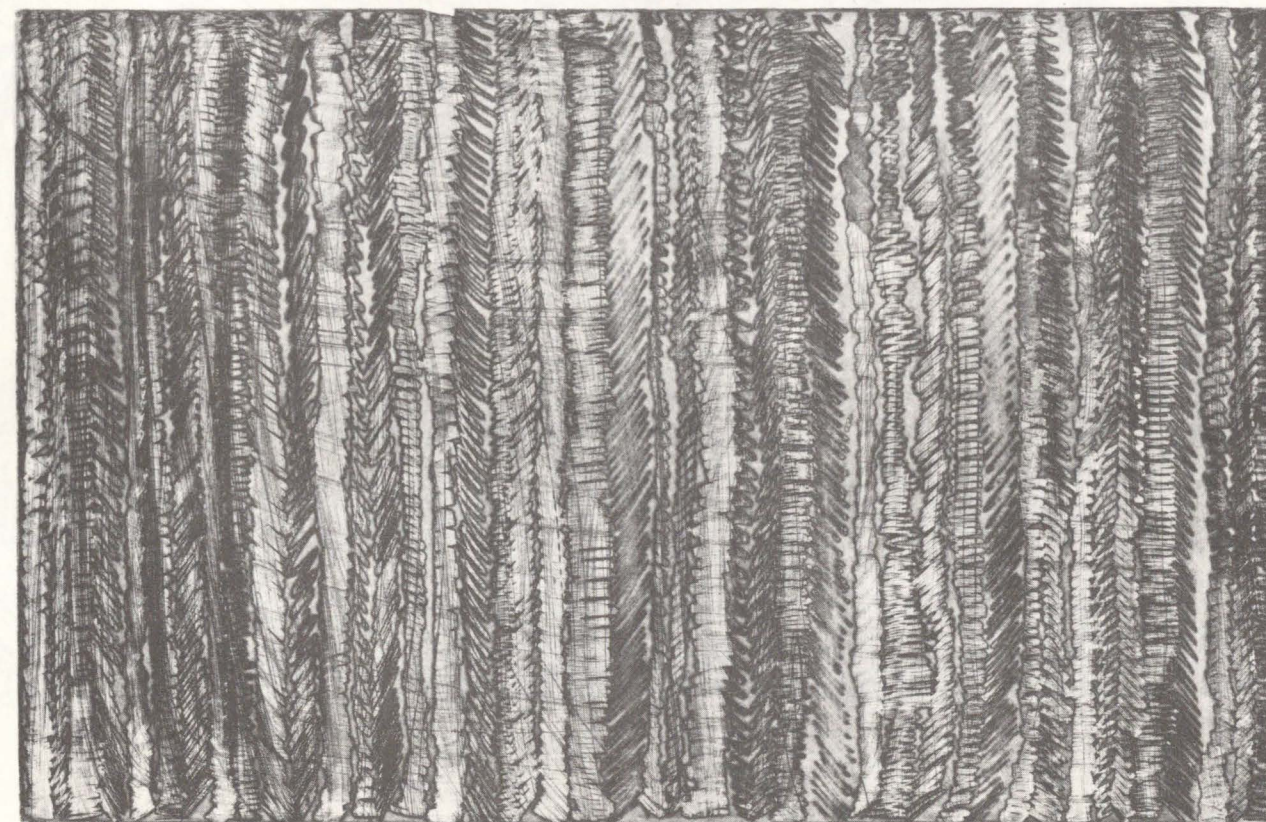
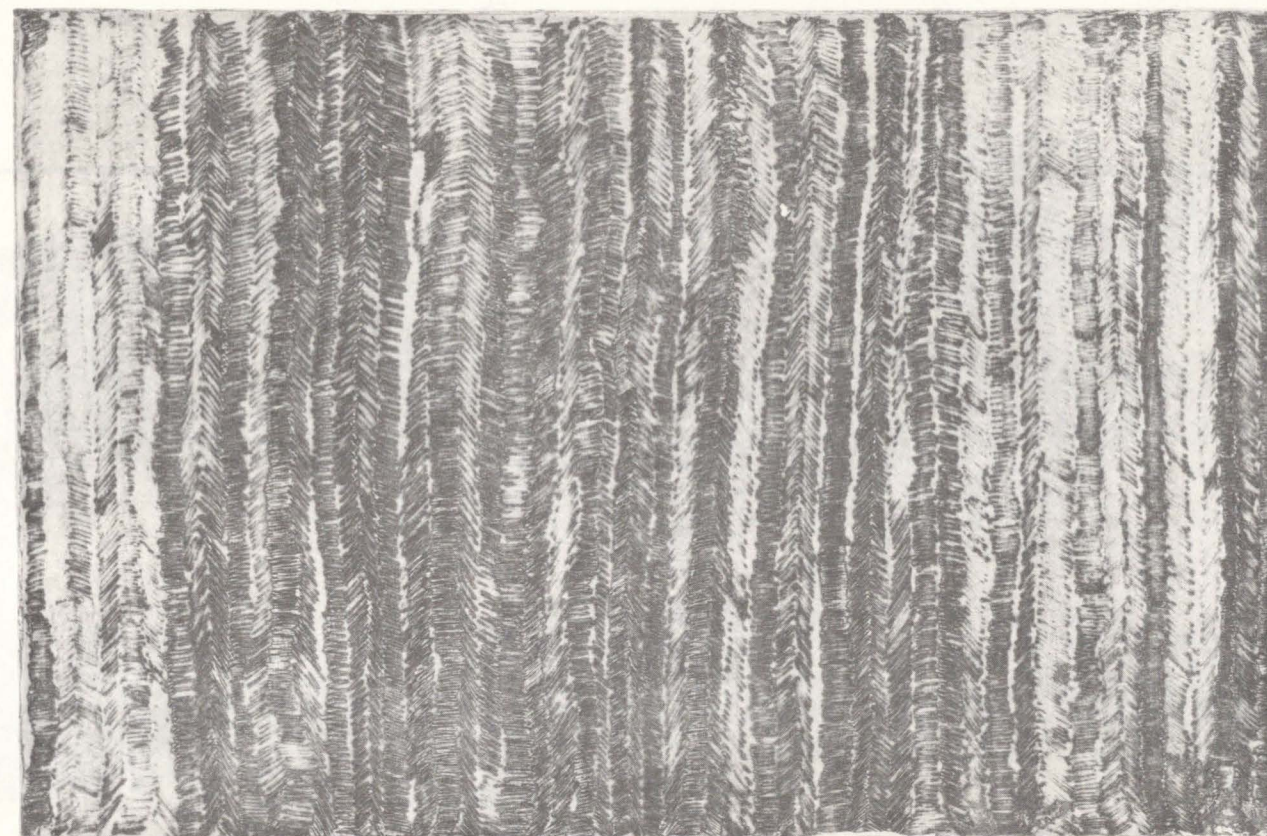


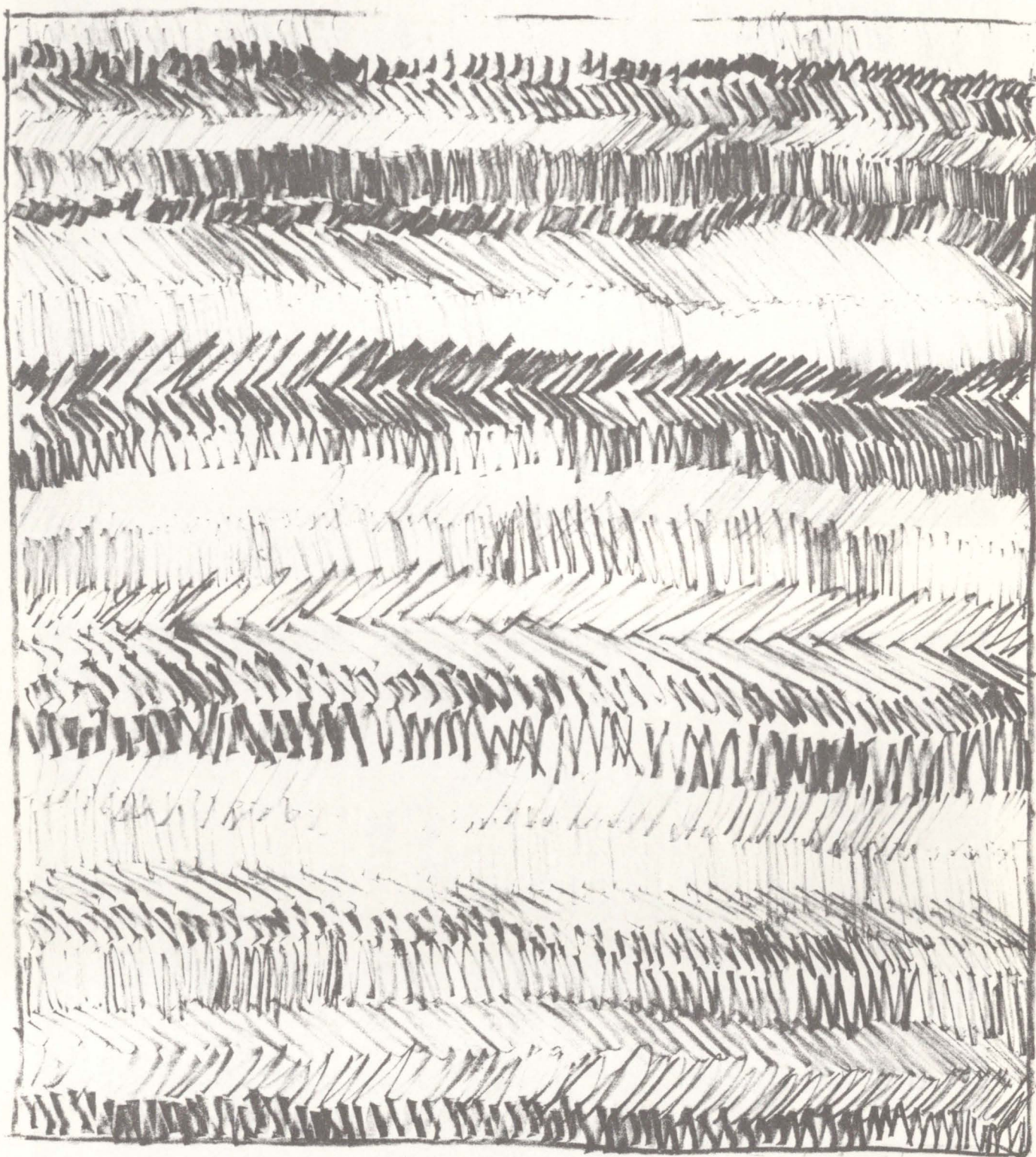
Paula Hampton

ARTIST'S STATEMENT

Recently my concerns have simply been to deal with the quality of line and how those lines will reproduce in the printing media, primarily lithography and intaglio.

GALLERY





CANCELLED APPOINTMENTS

by Susan Scibetta

I'm sure there could have been other endings,
but as it actually happened,
she met my father on the way down
the aisle and together
they marched into the refrigerator.
And it was a lovely wedding.
The maggots in the lettuce cried,
and tomatoes flung themselves in celebration.

And I was a lovely baby.

It happened that
the eyes were crossed, but that could be
repaired.
Everyone praised my marvelous
peanut-shaped head.
And they often flattered my mother
by saying that my ears looked exactly like handles.
And after me,

rolling down the chute,
came bags of male and female laundry,
that turned into piles that she had to cycle,
and hammer at, and
carry upstairs.
Her skin turned to burlap,
eyes into corners,
fingers to twine.
While her body developed the plump, ragged edges that
made you remember a sack of old clothes.

UNTITLED

by Susan Scibetta

Sometimes I remember my
mother,
taking everything they gave
and
trying to make it shine.

UNTITLED

by Susan Scibetta

Sometimes you think about your family.
father, sister, dog, everyone; you
sometimes wish that they
would get killed in a wreck.
Flattened by a semi, maybe,
the driver, flying, believing that they
were a tunnel to Cincinnati.
Or they would evaporate,
trapped in a fire that would
also wipe out all traces of the house.
You would come home for a
visit, maybe
married, maybe at
Christmastime,
and there would be nothing left at all,
much like
now only clearer.

MOTHER: DAUGHTER

by Sandra Love

I know who she is,
my daughter:
toddling after me,
grabbing my legs,
pushing through thighs she came through.

Each day I comb her hair,
turn her shirt right side out,
fit her socks around
fat pink toes.

She likes my suede jacket
to rub her cheek;
sometimes she put it on, flapping
its empty sleeves.

She sticks marshmallows into her mouth
and on her lips they dry
like etchings.

When she hurts,
she cries with her three-year-old soul.

DAUGHTER: MOTHER

by Sandra Love

Those fine, high breasts, that neat, gray head!

You come in dancing,
no longer twice my age, appearing
from the road, talking out the wrong turns you made on the way,
circling
whatever you've come to say.

I am afraid of you.
You want to devour me, keep me
rooted in your ground. I hear
you saying you never grew anything,
Daddy did that:
I knew in my child's moon-heart
his planting, your fear of wrong turns.

You eat up the highways going sixty-five,
going your age.
I remember your trying to die
like my father,
split into the windshield.

I want to keep you from the windshield.
I need to know you still laugh,
listen to stories, weave into your days.
I moan, fluid beneath trees, dreaming my moon orange.

I am stronger now. You are not so willing to die.
I can leave you rearranging my house,
scouring the sink that is never clean enough,
scaring away little growing things.

Only silence grows: your eyes
focus sharply still, but on something
far away,
somewhere I am not.

Lyn Lifshin is one of the most widely published poets in the little mag world today. Her first book, *BLACK APPLES*, was published by the Crossing Press. Currently she is working on her second book of poetry, *UPSTATE MADONNA*, and a novel commissioned by the Chicago Review Press.

Lifshin gave a poetry reading at Wright State University on April 10, 1975. Afterward she made this interview. It was conducted by Mark Willis and transcribed by Julia Miller.

The interview began with a general question about the poet's lifestyle and survival.

LIFSHIN: I have done workshops. I do readings. Those are the main ways that I make money, you know, living, the practical part of being a poet. I have been married and am just getting a divorce, so some of the problems I haven't really had to deal with yet—ha! They're coming up. I'd rather not teach full time. I have, I've taught workshops in my house, and I'm teaching a workshop at St. Rose, which is a small girls' school, this summer. I teach workshops occasionally, I like to do it for short periods of time, but I haven't really wanted to get into a full thing. In fact, I took a job at Thomas Jefferson College, and then in a rather unfair way, turned it down. Mainly, there are a lot of reasons for it, but one of them was that I just didn't want ten weeks, even ten weeks seemed too long. I was anxious to get started on this novel and didn't really want a ten-week stint. I just wanted to get going. But anyways, you mentioned to me about lifestyles and writing. I would really like them to be closer, that's what I was just saying coming over here. You know, what's really marvelous about someone like Gary



lyn lifshin

Snyder is that it seems that his lifestyle and his poetry and the kind of life that his poetry suggests—they all seem to be very, very *one*, and therefore he seems to bring it together. I'm really struggling in that way; that one poem where I said that the poem said what I did before I did them. Or that the poems are the one place that I said what I meant. I think that's really true. I think that I have been honest in the poems before I have been in my life in a lot of ways, and I think it's true of a lot of women. I think this whole thing about trying to please, trying to please for me is the biggest hassle, the biggest hang-up at all kinds of levels, except in poetry. I don't feel I've compromised anything in poetry, I feel there I've taken many risks. I've risked offending people. I've risked showing certain qualities that maybe I'm not really comfortable having people see. Now maybe, there are whole areas of things that I haven't written about yet that are probably somewhere deeper and hopefully I'll get to them. I'd like my life to be as honest as the poems, but I think, I feel in many ways that the poetry is more honest . . . not that they're both not real. I was saying this to somebody, I said this to Gary Snyder the other day. Really, I felt about him so much, and I felt there are so many poets who are so concerned, poetry is the only thing that really matters for them, their life is really not that important, and poems are the most important thing. It seems ideally your life should be as important as your poems. To get both of them to be important and to be honest would be an ideal that I would like to get and don't feel I've gotten that yet.

NEXUS: From the volume of your poetry which I have seen I would have suspected that the poems were your life, the central part of your life.

LIFSHIN: That's a terrible danger and I would hate to have that really be true. There have been times I suppose when poems were more real, different times when dreams have been more real. In many ways there have also been times when I just plunged into many kinds of crazy experiences. It seems that whatever I've done I've done excessively, very intensely, so whenever I have been writing I write very intensely and excessively, and I think when I've been living I've been doing that too. There is one danger, I think. A friend of mine said that he really had the feeling that he would sometimes create something in his life just to have something to write about. Like he said they would be in England and they would go break into some church, not because they were doing this spontaneously, but because later this would be something to write about. And I've even known poets—I met someone out in California who was telling me all this stuff and later said to me: don't use that in a poem, if I tell you this don't

Lifestyle and the Poet

use it in a poem. I think the biggest horror, the biggest nightmare would be a poet who got into whatever kind of experience, whether an emotional experience or whatever kind of experience, exclusively to write about it, to use life to write about it. Say you have an experience, you live something, then you write about it. I really feel that that can increase the intensity of that experience. I don't mean that writing about something diminishes it, but I think it would really get to be a nightmare if everything you did, or I did, or any poet did, was just for the sake of writing about it. It's a danger.

NEXUS: Your North poems, which you said you got ideas from reading about Alaska and your House poems, those seem to suggest that you can turn anything you experience into poetry and that you in fact do that.

LIFSHIN: Well, as I said, anything except soap and animals. I feel very often like going to these houses was a really . . . I mean I really did go to the houses. The North thing is somewhat of a vicarious thing through books, which I feel is also valuable. Somebody might argue and say you can't write about it if you've just read about it and haven't experienced it. But the houses . . . I just felt that the idea of writing about it just added an extra dimension or extra kind of excitement and also made it more real I suppose in a way to me. You know the whole thing about the word "using", somebody has this poem where they say love is using, two people using each other well. I think you can use something well or you can use where you exploit it or use it badly. I guess poetry is somehow using experience well and making that more valuable. But it's a risk for a poet or any artist if the art becomes more important. The more obsessed anyone gets with the art, it becomes . . . like that Bergman film . . . what's the Bergman film, *Through a Dark . . . Through a Glass Darkly* . . . isn't that where the man is watching his daughter? You know, he loves his daughter. He becomes so obsessed with her as a subject, that he becomes inhuman and she becomes a subject for his writing, rather than what she originally was. It is a kind of a danger. I've heard Eberhart say, really, to be a good poet you have to have a good life, and I don't know, I'm sort of intrigued by it. I think that maybe, maybe there's something to it. You can write very strong, powerful poems, be a very strong, powerful poet without being that, I'm sure. I'm sure you can be a really evil person and write good poems. But maybe . . . to write poetry that is very, very broad . . . I'm not sure, this is the thing I don't know, maybe it's just from hearing Snyder and Bly that I feel more that way. I don't think you could, you know. In poetry there's so much smallness and pettiness and

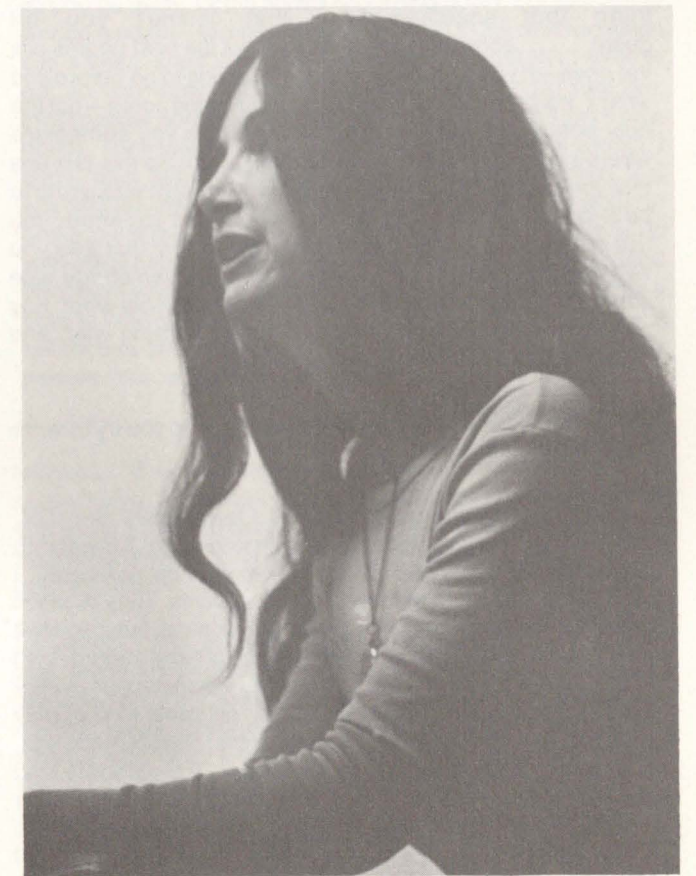
backbiting, and I just don't see how you can be, if you really get into all those ridiculous things. I don't see how you can continue to write, because they seem to be, I don't see how you can do that. I think that would really reduce you, I don't see how you can do that.

NEXUS: I'm curious to know how you work, your working habits. It seems that you write all the time. Is that true?

LIFSHIN: It isn't really. In the reading I said that sometimes I write between five to twenty poems . . . in a way that's not exactly true. First of all I never used to write on the weekends. If I haven't written for a long time, I might write a long group of poems, say on a Monday. By Tuesday, I could never keep up this pace. So by Tuesday maybe I'll write a couple. On Wednesday I'll write one, too; on Thursday I'll go out and lie in the sun. So it really isn't true that I write that much.

NEXUS: You don't put yourself on some kind of schedule, then?

LIFSHIN: Well, I used to really work in the morning, from 9 maybe to 12, and then, that used to be when I lived in another house, the mail would come at 12. There were all kinds of things connected with the mail. I had a much more rigid schedule then and now that I'm living a different kind of life I really have to kind of fit it in and do it when I can. Once I did have a book with me when I was with some people tearing down an old house. In the middle of tearing down all this plaster and watching the laths fall apart I would write some little



poems or jot things down. There was a time when I was in a house where most people were sleeping late. I would get up early in the morning and write then. I always felt better if I wrote something early in the morning. It didn't feel so compulsive, you know, resting.

NEXUS: Do you always carry a notebook with you?

LIFSHIN: No. In fact, this morning I woke up with some idea, then I lost it. No, I don't really. Although I have at times. One time someone asked me, they were doing an anthology of erotic poetry, and even though there are a lot of sexual things in my poems, sometimes they're intimate. So I had this one poem about a plumber that was kind of cute, funny, but I wasn't really that happy with it, and yet this person wanted it. There was a quick deadline. It had to be in at the end of the week. So I was thinking about it, but I really couldn't start doing it, nothing came and I went to this Bergman film. It was a festival. During the film I wrote down the whole poem on a piece of gum wrapper. So then I wrote a poem about writing a poem on a Wrigley Spearmint gum wrapper. But very often movies are something in a way that triggers poems a lot of times. The visual thing more than the contents. There's one poem that I really like, it's called "The Old Movie War Dream." It's going to be in *Stinktree* magazine, if it ever comes out. I went to this festival of war films. It was a terrible film, but some of the poem came out of that. I don't know how, but it did. It kind of grew. Someone asked me after the reading, what do you do if you have an idea and you can't quite get it into a poem. I feel that's a really big problem, because I feel that if you have an idea it's not—say you have a certain thing you want to write about, it's probably not going to be a very good poem. But if it's something that snatches you, that catches you off guard . . . somebody always says that the best poems are the ones—if you know where a poem's going to go before you write it, it's probably not going to be a very good poem—but the best poems, I think, are the ones that take you someplace where you didn't know you were going to go. So this last line that you had from the beginning that you thought was going to be a fantastic ending you have to cut out, and you know, you use that in another poem sometime. It's a poem that tells you something you didn't know. It's going to tell somebody else something they didn't know. No one wants to know what they already know unless it's said in such a surprising way, and then it still is something a little different.

NEXUS: Do you make notes for poems or do you try to write drafts spontaneously?

LIFSHIN: Both things. Sometimes I have notes, like, OK, what I've been talking about. I've been writing these madonna poems. Some are in *Wormwood*, some are on postcards. I can't explain it. Some of them are funny poems. They're small poems. They're not something about madonnas, but they take madonna, madonna is a metaphor, it sort of has a sacred, kind of elevated implication, and I sort of put this metaphor in very earthy, certainly worldly situations, so I get some kind of play between that. So they're all these poems: plaster madonna, fiberglass madonna, broken nail madonna. There's some kind of word we have for two things that are not suited to each other together. I don't know what it's called, oxymoron, I don't know, it's probably not that, it's something. Writing one of these kind of triggers a whole lot. When I went to the airport I had this idea

that I had this airport madonna. And the one thing that I was sort of talking to Gary Pacernick about on the way up, it was something that Bly said. It was really funny, because I had written this poem before Bly had said this. But he was saying that poets who are confessional poets end up, well, they tend to be unhappy people who get their unhappiness or the most horrible, depressing, upsetting things in their life out on paper, and instead of helping them it makes them more and more angry at themselves because they've exposed it and they've used it and then they end up in a worse state and then they kill themselves. I don't really think this is true, but I did have this image of the fact that when you do write, especially when you give readings, you are really turning yourself inside out. I don't know if I'd call this writing madonna or what, but it's about the idea, so what you end up with is you have all the inside things, all the pain and all the loss and everything turned inside so you're ending up full of, instead of feelings, you're full of hair, nails, and skin and scabs. So this was another madonna poem that grew. I reached into my pocketbook once and I had all these broken pens . . . these are very small, they're really very funny trivial poems but I have another one called "Writing Madonna", something like "ink on her fingers, one brown shoe, one black shoe on her toes," just sort of taking kind of trivial, small, expected things and twisting them. And I have notes for all of these in a notebook. I wrote down "Writing Madonna" and some other madonnas. Then, as I had time, I wrote the poems. So sometimes I do that. I very often keep lists of things I might want to write about. I wrote a series of Mad Girl poems and I wrote about 20 to 30 of them, but I have about 50 other titles I've never written. I don't know if I ever will write them, but I have all the titles and the poems could follow from that. Very often, I keep all these lists and then they end up being put in the drawer and they never are actually finished. I used to really even write, I never even kept the rough drafts. Now some library wants to buy them, so I keep all the poems; I write them in a notebook. Before I used to just write them on lined paper and fold them up and throw them in a bag; and now I at least keep them in a notebook, which is sort of helpful because now I can remember when I wrote them, February to March, and stuff like that.

NEXUS: You work in series a lot, don't you?

LIFSHIN: Yeah, I do, really. I mean I did. Very often I'll write a lot of poems about one thing, a lot of these house poems and all these madonna poems. They don't seem to be important poems. They're kind of exercises, but they're just a different kind, they're funny and they're light and they're small and I think they're witty. Maybe nobody else does.

NEXUS: Do you work any different way on 'important' poems?

LIFSHIN: Well, I'd never say important, that's a bad word. You never know what's important, you never know. No. Some of the best poems are the fastest, easiest poems and some, the ones that have been reworked and reworked and reworked . . . In a way, all the poems you write are kind of preparation for future poems. So you say you wrote one poem easily, you've probably written a hundred poems to get to that one poem. You don't think about that. They're all kind of a practice for something a little later on.

NEXUS: Do you have any special requirements as far as working conditions go? Special kind of paper, or place, or anything like that?

LIFSHIN: Pens that write. (Laughter.)

NEXUS: And gum wrappers?

LIFSHIN: No, now that's not really that funny, because to me the most annoying thing is, I mean, I buy all these ballpoints, these cheap ballpoint pens. And in fact, just recently I went in and bought six dollars worth, and ended up losing my Bank Americard, because it was overdrawn and they wouldn't give it back to me and I got back and none of these pens would work, so it's really a very frustrating thing, to sit and you start writing and then nothing writes. And in the middle of trying to find a good pen, you've lost the poem, so that's, I mean that isn't as facetious as it sounds. Right now, I do like writing in notebooks, because I like knowing, I like keeping track of when I wrote a poem, even though before it didn't really matter. I have written in very noisy places, like on a bus. Or when I got on the plane this girl next to me had just been converted to Jesus, and she was really laying it on me and I thought how am I going to write this poem, here she is right next to me, and I'm trying and she's going on and on and I said I was a writer and she said why don't you write about Jesus. Well, that was a big interruption. I really didn't write much while she was talking to me. But she was in the middle on the plane, in the middle of three people, so she started talking to the guy next to her, and then I could write. I don't write with music or I don't write with the radio on, although sometimes I'll be listening to something and something will come to me and then I can. Lately I've been changing, I've been writing in bed very often, either early in the morning or late at night. I usually worked dressed in very sloppy clothes, very loose sweatshirts and very sloppy comfortable clothes. When I'm writing I try not to answer the phone, although sometimes I do, and that can totally throw something. I don't answer the door. Places like the MacDowell art colony at Yaddo at first seem almost too perfect because you have total silence, but then you get really used to that. I don't think there's any other kind of requirement. I can't write when my mother's visiting me.

NEXUS: Why?

LIFSHIN: Because she's always talking. And my cat has a tendency to pull the ribbon out of the typewriter. These are all slight problems. I don't demand a silent, airtight room. And sometimes, I've written poems sitting out in the yard, like I mentioned. "You Understand the Requirements" and "But Instead Has Gone Into Woods," I happen to remember, and also another poem that's also in *Black Apples*, called "Why Is the House Dissolving?" I can remember actually writing those outside the house with people wandering up and down the street. There's a whole lot of dream poems that have come, many have come really through dreams, some are literally dreams. Some have come from movies. The one that is the title poem of *Black Apples*, is called "The Dream of Black Apples War" was a dream I had when I was camping out, and I woke up, then I wrote down, in fragments. It didn't even come in any order. I wrote down the fragments and I didn't know what it was about. Really, it was like a different kind of poem. I had a

feeling that somehow it would all fit together later, but I didn't know how, and it really did, though at that point I could never have written it. When I went to write it down it all fit together. I realized later, in some weird, unconscious way, after I had written it, it was sort of influenced by Bergman's film. It had an atmosphere of a place with a war going on, kind of an unnamed country where there was a war, and a feeling of something impending. But I write other dream poems that I suppose in a conscious way are maybe patterned after that. That was a totally different way of writing. It even has a different look on the paper if you look at it, a different rhythm, kind of long lines, different, very different.

NEXUS: This question relates back to lifestyle. Do you feel that you have to be selfish in order to write, do you have to tell people in your life, stay away, I'm trying to write? Is that a working condition?

LIFSHIN: Well, it hasn't exactly been, although for a while when I was married, I had this normal life where my husband went off to work, so I had the whole day, and I don't have any children, so it wasn't a matter of telling anyone. He just wasn't there from 9 to 5, so there was no problem. Now my closest friends are other poets so they do understand about that. I guess I tend to be more obsessive and really, I do write more. I'm more obsessive about writing and also about answering mail and sending things out, and it is a problem because they write in spurts but they don't write as much as I do. If somebody calls me up, if those people aren't writers, it's almost impossible to tell somebody, look, I can't talk to you, I'm in the middle of a poem. They just really don't understand that. You have to say the cat's throwing up. That they'll understand, then they'll let you go away. Or the house is burning down. But say you're writing a poem—to most people and even to my mother, when she's there, she's very understanding, but I feel like I have to get up very early, because otherwise I really don't feel like, most people don't understand if you say you have to work on a poem. They feel it's selfish. I don't know if I feel it's selfish. I don't really know. A poet, any writer, anybody creative, just any ordinary person, just needs a certain amount of time just to understand and get in touch with what you are which has to do with other people. If you have only time alone, you're at a dead end; but if you have only time with other people you never have time to kind of reflect on it. So that can be a problem, to get a balance of time alone and time, meaningful time, with other people. You certainly need both of them.

NEXUS: Everyone knows that there's no money in writing poetry today, and unless you latch on to a university position or you get a grant, you have to deal with the problems of how to survive and write at the same time. How have you dealt with that?

LIFSHIN: Well, as I said, I haven't honestly been faced with that, really, I have been married. I'm in the process of getting a divorce. I have not been financially independent for some time, so I've never totally dealt with that problem. I have been offered jobs, and I have, really, for different reasons not accepted them.

NEXUS: Teaching jobs?

LIFSHIN: Teaching jobs. Not teaching jobs, poet-in-residence's that have not been, they've been a kind of, you know, for one semester, it hasn't been a job. Really, I suppose the most helpful thing is to do poetry readings. Anne Sexton had this whole thing about readings in *NPR*, saying that they were such an exhausting thing, it was such a drain, and that she had sort of a love/hate feeling for it. What I feel about it is as close to that as anything. Once I get there, I love doing it, somewhat, but I also hate it, and I feel, even though I've gotten out of it, I feel a little more comfortable doing it. I've seen people like Ed Dorn get up and just very casually give a reading. I haven't got to that point where I can just say, OK, I'm going to mail a letter, I'm going to give a reading, I'm going to do something like that. So I feel like it's a big, big drain, so I couldn't really do it too much, and in order to do it, I feel like I have had to turn down readings that haven't been a certain fee, unless they've been like on the way back or something. Unless it's a benefit I just won't give any more free readings. And this sometimes offends people. But it really is the only way a poet can make any money. It's really funny; say you're publishing; in the beginning most poets are so flattered to be asked to be published, or to be asked to read, they'll just do it. They'll just run off and do it, no matter whether it's ten cents. I don't think there's anything bad about that. But you are going to have to find some way to survive, even if it's only a matter of paying for stamps. You know I send out a lot of things, so you can imagine how much money goes into just something very trivial like stamps. So just even to pay the expenses, otherwise poetry becomes just an indulgence, just a hobby, there has to be some way to do that.

NEXUS: In the "No More Apologies, No More Little Laughing Blues" poem, you discuss the difficulty in explaining poetry writing to other people. Did you have problems like that that tended to inhibit your writing poetry?

LIFSHIN: It wasn't really explaining the poems so much, in fact it was really explaining my lifestyle in a way. I was married to someone who, to give you an idea of what some of the problems were, his family was also Philip Roth's family. The same relatives. Their idea was that a wife was to have the right silverware, be a good cook, which I actually am, although I don't want to be it just because it's expected. Mainly you invited the in-laws to dinner, you have the right number of babies. If you didn't have babies you had a job, but you didn't do anything as indulgent as go to graduate school yourself or worse, write poems or have cats. It was a lot more complicated than that, but I really was always apologizing. I mean, I literally did pretend I had a job, instead of that I was going to school because these in-laws could never accept it. They couldn't accept the fact that at that time I was 22 and I didn't wear my hair up, or that I was 22 and was doing things that—they expected that at the time you're married you become a matron and you do certain expected things. So in that poem when I talk about explaining, I think I really meant explaining the things I cared about. One time I discovered some folk song, and I was real excited about it, and they thought, you're not supposed to be excited about anything, you're not supposed to laugh at anything, you're supposed to go to bar mitzvahs and weddings and entertain and not cause any stir. So not having children was a big thing. Even now my father-in-law will come and say, well, you should have washed his socks more. Never the idea that there were some kind of important difficul-

ties, it was just, couldn't you give up writing, do you have to write those poems? If you stayed home more . . . This was when I first began writing. I didn't go running around giving that many readings. But when I say explaining I mean explaining the things . . . that my friends were different, the people I got to know through writing. My husband's a scientist. He was always suspicious or resentful of the people, of any poet, or any artist, mainly because he wanted to be one. It wasn't explaining the poems so much, because the poems are quite clear, but it was explaining why I wrote or, explaining the need to write, or explaining the fact that I didn't follow these really traditional things. You have to realize this was in the middle-early '60s so maybe now they would accept something a little more, but really, I don't know, probably not. And then of course later there were poems that certainly could give them reason, my husband or anyone else. But when I did this television program in Albany, see, they were partly kind of proud of the fact that here I was on television. O had an hour reading on this station. But at the same time they were horrified so there was this mixed thing: well, if you can make some money from it, it can't be all bad, but do you have, if I wrote poems about flowers, if the poems were nicer than I write, it wouldn't be half bad. But I never had to explain the poems, except there were people who knew me and they always said: you're so gentle, you're so quiet, you're so, you know, you don't say these words, and yet you have these poems about someone who goes to see if they're knocked up, and you've got cunt in it, and you've got fuck in this poem, what is this all about? You've got something about rape, were you ever raped? I never was ever raped, but people would get upset by that. That was the kind of explaining I wrote about, some subject of a poem that was startling. But I never had to explain the meaning of poems, at least I don't think I did. Those poems are probably much more clear and explicit. I think the poems now are—not that they're more difficult, but I think they're less—there's this whole thing called meat poetry, Blazek and all those people. You said gut, or vomit, everything out on paper and I've sort of gotten away from that somehow. But I hope they're just as honest.

NEXUS: All right, for my last question, I'd like to ask you the broadest question. You spend a lot of time and a lot of energy working on poetry. What is a poem? Do you have a definition of what a poem is, or do you have a concept of what a poem does?

LIFSHIN: Something that knocks you down and makes you feel alive and terrible and happy or unhappy. I have something I could actually read that I wrote in a really spontaneous way. I think it really comes as close to anything that I really feel about what a poem is: "It seems to me that a poem has to be sensual, not necessarily sexual, though that's OK, too, before it's anything else. So rhythm matters a lot to me, at least before images even. I want whoever looks at it, whoever eats the poem, to feel the way old ebony feels across an old English mansion, the smell of lemon in strange places, skin. I always steal things I like from people, other poets, especially blues, old black and country blues, rhythm and lines so simple and true they knock you down." I guess the poetry I really like is something—I don't mean it has to be startling. Some of the poets I really like are people like Philip Levine or Robert Mezey, who are not shocking. I like this feeling of when I get done with a poem of: wow, or exactly, or most of all I wish I had written it, and then I steal it, or something like that.

NO TITLE

by J. R. Alley

To be a man
who masturbates
in record time,
who can do it in
 public restrooms
 the bus
 the subway
 under a newspaper on his lap
would be easier—
because
it is all up there,
vagina-safe,
walled,
moist,
 dark,
 empty.

At the edge of the bed, in the darkness,
two finger nibbling at it won't
do sometimes—
again alone
left with sticky fingers
sometimes wishing it had
been a man;
not knowing if you're really
satisfied:
if the orgasm made your
nipples stand up or
was it the cold?
Was it the right kind?
Enough tremors?
The groans hollow?

Even alone
 you lie back exhausted, almost
 drugged into sleep—
 the hand is limp,
 the wet dries to a dirty-pants'
 smell while

the nipples flatten,
 sweat-beads hang on like
 a loose layer of papyrus skin:
 but it stood up—
 not like an awkward Maypole—
 but it was hard and alive.
 It wasn't like a wild garden hose
 filled with too much pressure making
 it firm and wet—
 but it stood, erected by the gentle
 urging of two fingers, urging it up
 and out and
 you did know:
 it was hard and alive
 and not wanting
 anything.

VOICES DOWNSTAIRS

by J. R. Alley

We closed the heat register
 so we wouldn't hear their
 voices anymore
 but after we had made love,
 lying in the silk of sweat
 and recovering the sails
 of our bodies,
 we opened the register
 to find out we were
 not lost and drifting
 in an estranged universe.

AMERICA IS

by J. R. Alley

America is
 a sky filled with colored, clinking
 on-off neon words:
 NO VACANCY.
 America is
 broken sailor kites;
 Jackson Pollock at every intersection;
 imitation leather seats, vinyl roofs;
 an insurance saleswoman taking her own
 life in an abandoned mobile home after
 a successful road trip.
 America is
 flat grass land with heat lightning racking
 across a vast bruised sky;
 a tumble weed knocking at everydoor as
 it passes and no one answers;
 a star-sky crinkles like filament and falls
 into downtown Cleveland.
 I am America.
 I am the soft lazy buffalo copulating with the wind.
 I scalped Custer with a shoe horn.
 I am the Christmas tree that never dies.
 I am abandoned down in the street, behind a drug
 store, beside the railroad track; left in a
 tow-away zone and unclaimed at the bus terminal.
 I am Manhattan, Chicago, Peoria, Peru . . . so are you.
 I am a rusty, dented shopping cart left on its
 side in a sewage creek.
 America: gluttoned, swollen, sore:
 A one-eyed soldier;
 a fanless peacock tied to the bumper of a car on
 a partially constructed highway;
 the useless celebration of pennants around a used-
 car lot and the flags on the antennae that wave
 for nothing;
 a nightstand of barbiturates, a closet full of
 plastic shoes.
 America: pitted, peeled, unholy:
 with blacktopped intestines,
 a suburban labyrinth—a maze of monotony, station
 wagons and two bedroom brick ranch houses.

We are America destroying waltwhitmanwatermelon—
widdling it down to grinning rinds of gummy vermillion.
A dinosaur that sleeps in its own urine.
A madman that pulls a knife on a sheep.
A row of theatre seats with the ancient remains of
voyeur semen sliding into a pool of Coke and
discarded peanut shells.
I am America, you are too.
We can have Canada for breakfast and
Mexico at night.
I am gum on your shoe.

SUMMER VACATION

by J. R. Alley

through indiana no vacancy neon
by-passed indianapolis going
straight through to dayton
too long on the road
too many radio stations found then faded
the tires were bald and the suitcases
were all filled with dirty clothes and
cheap breakable souvenirs
it was the night richard speck killed eight chicago nurses
that night was stuck down at the edge of the horizon
the way a boy scout secures his tent
it was july the air was hot and thick
but more clearly
i remember the stars that night

Local Resources

Health Care and Social Services—
DAYTON FREE CLINIC AND COUNSELING. 1005 N. Main. 228-2226.
DAYTON WOMEN'S HEALTH AND ABORTION CLINIC. 340 S. Dixie. 296-1306.
FOUNDER'S CLINIC. 340 E. Broad, Columbus. 614-224-8083. Abortion, Birth control.
BIRTHRIGHT. 223-3446. No charge to caller. Pregnancy counseling.
ABORTION COUNSELING SERVICE. 1203 Salem. 278-6144.
DAYTON CHILDBIRTH EDUCATION ASSOCIATION. 1221 Wilmington. 294-2115.
FAMILY SERVICES ASSOCIATION. 184 Salem. 222-9481. Marriage counseling, adoption.
OPERATION VENUS. 184 Salem. 223-4433. VD information and counseling.
PARENTS WITHOUT PARTNERS. 1400 E. Third. 228-6999. Widowed, divorced or single.
PARENT CHILD TRAINING CENTER. 1127 Salem. 278-0633.
PLANNED PARENTHOOD. 224 Wilkinson. 226-2780. Birth Control.
RIGHT TO LIFE. 1114 N. Main. 223-9530.
VICTIMIZATION PROJECT. 223-4613. Rape counseling.

Feminist Organizations—
DAYTON WOMEN'S CENTER. 1309 N. Main Street. 223-3296. Headquarters for NOW. Classes: Women In Transition (Divorce), Auto Mechanics, Careers (Job re-entry), Self-defense, Politics of the Women's Movement, Our Bodies, Ourselves. Childcare is available. Ten dollar contribution is requested.
NOW Activities—Employment task force, Education, Rape and Legislation task forces.

FAIRBORN NOW. 878-3323. Task Forces: Education, studied sexism in textbooks and is working to change curriculum in Fairborn and Wayne Twp. Schools. Rape: Drafted recommendations to Paul Leonard which influenced current reform bill. Legislation: working for credit reform. Employment, Consciousness Raising, Committee for Women in the Media. The Fairborn Chapter of NOW is also sponsoring the State Now convention at the Ramada Inn in Dayton Nov. 22 and 23. All are welcome, only members can vote. For more information call 878-2485.
ANTIOCH WOMEN'S CENTER. Antioch College. 767-7331. Organizes social events for women; dinners, swims, etc. Publishes a newsletter. Working on a journal of women's poetry.

Miscellaneous—
CITY OF DAYTON HUMAN RELATIONS. 405 S. Main 225-5337. Equal Opportunity Employment.
LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS. 120 W. Second. 228-4041.
Y.W.C.A. 141 W. Third. 461-5550. Classes, swimming, girls camp.
WYSO. 91.5 FM Antioch College, Yellow Springs. 864-2022 (toll free). The only non-commercial radio station in the area, WYSO has several programs of special interest to women. These include The Mother Jones Memorial Special, produced weekly by a collective of women at Antioch, and the Gay Show with Cyd Payne. WYSO also broadcasts numerous public affairs documentaries, and there are 25 hours of tapes made at the recent socialist feminist conference available in WYSO's library.

LADIES AND GENTLEMEN THE BRAIN

by Michael Graham

My Friends
the brain is a delicate precision made instrument
to operate it you must be a mechanic
some brains need no work
others do
if you are disturbed
you must go to work quickly
before mental illness get you good
in dreams
you must learn to attack naked women
but refrain from such tendencies outwardly manifest
if you have nightmares
you must learn to look close with your night eyes
see what causes them
learn to show your brain pictures by day
look at freshly painted fruits
or landscapes by Van Gogh
be sure they make an impression
so when you go to bed
you won't need a nite lite
a glass of warm milk
or a good friend to hold your hand when you slumber
brains
like the legs and arms of little boys and girls
get cuts and scratches
such a mark can change personalities
remember that brains heal slowly
and before they do there will be many days
when you can feel
fresh blood flowing through those convolutions
but don't worry
all is not lost
for brains do heal
and leave scars
Scars that are vulnerable to stress
scars that with stress
make one confused or bewildered
you must learn to ask yourself
can you have more than one
and out of these healed wounds
can spring no more truth-tellers or Roberts

voices that talk night and day and offend you
learn that it is dangerous to mix good liquor
with stelazine or prolixum
you must learn how to handle stress
if you don't your brain becomes bloated
like a lopsided basketball that has been kicked too much
and when you bounce it you never get that true bounce
learn the food that brains need
like chewing gum cigarets and beer
a brain needs gum to reduce tension
cigarets and beer serve the same purpose
learn how to theorize on the brain
learn the id, ego, and superego
analyze dreams
say for instance you dream about a blue ink pen
and forget about it
until one day you recall your dream
and suddenly purchase one
you must merely say the id has satisfied itself
you must say it however wrong
always remember that Freud was the best
and since there has been a succession of pretenders
Laing says we are not sick
schizophrenia is ultimate reality
But really who needs or cares
what is ultimately real
learn to ask psychiatrist questions
what is the difference between a breakdown and schizophrenia
when sick you must take tests
to determine the nature of your illness
learn the difference between a Rorschach and Minnesota
don't forget work therapy
do gardening and cut grass
learn to bake cakes and prepare foods
remember that social activity is also fine
learn to forgive those responsible for your sickness
even though they think they don't need forgiving
check gas stoves
and stay clear of poisons
stay away from guns and sharp things
above all learn what constitutes genius
for you may be a troubled genius like me
even though you be a genius
it's really not worth much
for you usually die around thirty
that means I have eight years to become famous
I would hate to die and not know my fame
ladies and gentlemen this is the brain
love thy brain
for we only have one
placed and rooted on our lefthand side

TEEVEE

by Yvan Melnikoff

TEEVEE
marching through the network channels of
AMERICA!
remote controlled FOLGER'S pours;
steaming hot and
INSTANT,
to the orgasmic pleasure of
carefully selected representative
HOUSEWIVES.

toothpaste oozes from the sepia tones
onto golden globe pianola parties,
and into the sawdust on the grocery store floor.
GOOD-OLE-DAYS.

aerosol hair lacquers and baking pan
NO-STICKS!
spray-butter slides your fries and
personality is atomized into
SECRET.
toilet paper streamers and
paper towel soakers,
smiling generations of silently rusting
PEPSI.

magic plastic PROPEIL products
\$9.98
"DON'T WAIT"

it'll smash tomatoes

POP!
spilling sticky slimed seeds on
frustrated fingers.
it'll dent carrots,
crunch thumbs,
and crack in less than

90 DAYS
GUARANTEED!
JUST THE THING FOR MOTHER'S DAY
SUPPLY IS LIMITED
OPERATORS WAITING NOW
TO TAKE YOUR CALL

We've all come to look for

AMERICA!

between the toilet bowel polishers
and sexy white smile brighteners.
JERRY LEWIS ON JOHNNY CARSON
FLIP WILSON ON MERV GRIFFIN
filmed yesterday
so audiences today could see it
tomorrow
in time zones where now was before,
and yesterday was a day ago, except;
in areas blacked out for sunday
FOOTBALL.

ROLLER DERBY

by Chrissy Vanderkooi

Long peroxide hair
lying
on the track
as
a
bald girl
skates
without
a helmet
and uses
her knee
to put
a
twisted
ovary
back in
its
proper place.



PHOTOS BY DEREK PELL



Distance Avails Me Not

by Archie V. Taylor

1

All day long the cold March wind blew hard against the sides of the house. When night came and it got dark, it got colder and the wind blew stronger. There was no weatherboarding on the outside of the house. The cold March wind slammed against the house and blew through the cracks and rattled the torn wallpaper on the walls, the night I was born.

2

My bed had a cover over it. My bed was dark. My bed was cold. My bed was hard. I cried a lot.

3

I lived with fear. Birds frightened me. Bugs frightened me. Sleep frightened me. Dark frightened me. I lived with fear.

4

My hair was long. My mother curled my hair. My mother dressed me in dresses. When anyone asked my mother if I was a boy or a girl, my mother would raise my dress and show them I was a boy. It embarrassed me. I always tried to hide when anyone came to see my mother.

5

My brother was older than me. My brother teased me. My brother made fun of me. My brother made me cry. I did not like my brother.

6

My playmate was a girl. I made my playmate cry one time. I promised my playmate a penny when I got rich if she would stop crying. My brother heard me promise my playmate a penny when I got rich. My brother laughed at me. I did not like my brother. I did not play with my playmate no more.

7

I liked to play in dirt. I got my clothes dirty. My mother spanked me because I got my clothes dirty. I played in dirt anyway.

8

My mother took me to visit my uncle. We stayed with my uncle a week. My uncle had one short leg and one long leg. My uncle shot himself in the knee with a gun one time. My uncle patted me on the head and called me little man. I did not like my uncle.

9

I loved my cousin. My cousin was a young woman. My cousin had yellow hair. My cousin had blue eyes. My cousin made me laugh. I loved my cousin.

10

One night my cousin got in bed and leaned over to pull up the covers. Her pajama top fell open. I saw her breasts. They were so beautiful, I had to touch them. They were soft and warm. My cousin laughed and put her arms around me and made me laugh. She was soft and warm. I loved my cousin.

11

My mother took me to Sunday school every Sunday. One time my mother got sick. My mother sent me to Sunday school in the car with the preacher. The preacher asked me if I wanted to go to heaven. I asked the preacher where's heaven. The preacher told me where heaven was at. It sounded like a beautiful place to go to. I wanted to go there real bad. The preacher told me that all I would have to do there was to sing hymns of praise to God and play a harp. That made me feel bad. I could not go to heaven. I could not play a harp.

12

My brother took me to school. The school had two rooms. My brother went into one room and left me in the other room with strangers. I had to pee. I did not know what to do. I peed in my pants. Everyone laughed at me. I did not like school.

13

The teacher tacked white cards across the top of the blackboard. A different letter of the alphabet was printed in black on each white card. All of the letters of the alphabet were

in the row of cards across the top of the blackboard, except the letter L. The letter L was taped to the blackboard below the other letters. The teacher asked me to say the alphabet. I said all of the letters of the alphabet except the letter L. I would not say the letter L. The teacher put the letter L in the row with the other letters of the alphabet. I still would not say the letter L. I thought the letter L had something wrong with it. I thought the teacher was testing me. I thought if I said the letter L, the teacher would wash my mouth out with soap and water. It took me a long time to say the letter L.

14

The next year I got a new teacher. She was a young woman. She had brown hair and blue eyes. She made me laugh. One day I ran up to her and put my arms around her. She was soft and warm. I loved my new teacher.

15

A little girl sat next to me in the classroom. She had black and brown eyes. She was pretty to look at. I followed her around just to look at her. One day I cut my foot on a piece of glass. The little girl saw me cut my foot. My foot did not hurt at all. When I went back into the classroom, my teacher saw my cut foot. My teacher got bandages and alcohol to fix my cut foot with. I looked up as my teacher poured alcohol on my cut foot, and I saw the little girl watching me. Her eyes looked dark. Her eyes looked cold. Her eyes looked hard. It hurt then. It hurt something awful. I did not follow the little girl around just to look at her no more.

16

I asked the preacher where God came from. The preacher said, "That's a question that requires some deep thought. I'll have to think about it before I try to answer." He is still thinking about it, I guess.

17

I asked my mother where babies came from. My mother said, "Go outside and play." I went outside. The bull was riding

the back of the cow in the pasture again. I watched the bull ride the back of the cow in the pasture. I wondered if men rode the backs of women to make babies.

18

I asked my brother what did fuck mean. My brother said, "I'll slap the shit out of you, if I ever hear you say that word again." I made sure he was not around when I said that word again.

19

I asked my father why boys and girls were different. My father said, "Stop asking fool questions. Can't you see I'm busy? Can't you see I got work to do? Stop asking fool questions." My father was always busy. My father always had work to do. I never got to know my father very well.

20

One time my father took me to town and left me by myself while he took care of some business. It was the first time I had ever been in town by myself. I wandered the streets and tried to see everything before my father finished his business. I came upon two women who were fighting in the street. Some men had gathered and now watched the fight. I was afraid to walk past the women. So I stopped and watched them fight. They pulled each other's hair and clawed and scratched and screamed and cursed. Then one woman hit the other woman with her fist and knocked the other woman down. The woman who got knocked down hit the sidewalk and sprawled flat on her back. Her dress flew up around her waist. She had on no drawers. I had never seen a woman without drawers on before. I walked over to the woman and looked at her. After a minute or two, she opened her eyes. I said, "Lady, you ain't got on no drawers." I thought she should know, but all the men laughed. I do not know why they laughed, but they laughed. I ran away.

21

My father bought me a new pair of shoes. They were too big for me, but they were army shoes, and I was proud of my new army shoes. I wore my new army shoes to school one day. Everyone laughed at me and made fun of my new army shoes. I do not know why they laughed at me and made fun of my new army shoes. I was proud of my new army shoes.

22

One time it rained so hard that after it stopped raining, frogs covered the ground. Everywhere I looked I saw frogs. When the sun came out again, the frogs hopped into the open field and died. My father plowed up the field and planted corn. He had a very good crop that year.

23

One of the churches held a revival. It was the church that handled snakes. A man brought a snake to church for them to handle. The snake was coiled up in a fruit jar. The man handed the fruit jar to the preacher and waited in the back of the church to see what would happen when they handled the snake. After a while, the preacher opened the fruit jar and got out the snake. The snake bit the preacher and three other people before the church could empty through the windows. "Best damn pet I ever had," the man said. He went to the front of the church and picked up the fruit jar. Then he called to the snake, and the snake crawled to the fruit jar and coiled up inside of it. The man walked out of the church with the fruit jar cradled in his arms. No one asked him to stay. No one asked him to return.

24

My class put on a play. I was not in the play. I was not asked to be in the play. I did not want to see the play, but I went to see the play anyway. While the play was still going on, I got up and

went out into the hallway. A girl followed me out into the hallway. The doors to the classrooms were unlocked. We went into one of the empty rooms. It was dark. I kissed the girl and put my hands on her breasts. She giggled. I asked the girl if I could do it to her. She giggled and said I was too heavy to do it to her. The next day I told my best friend, the girl told me I was too heavy to do it to her. My best friend told everyone in school, the girl said I was too heavy to do it to her. Everyone in school called me Too Heavy. I never told my best friend anything after that.

25

My biology class went on a field trip. I learned a lot of biology on the field trip. When I got into the woods, while the rest of the class was studying birds and trees and plants, I slipped away from the class with a girl. On the moss near a hickory tree, I had sex with her. She lay on the moss and peeled bark from the hickory tree and popped her bubble gum while I had sex with her. I learned a lot of biology on the field trip that day.

26

One of my teachers always talked of man's noble ambition. The idea of man's noble ambition fired my imagination. I wanted to be sure I understood what man's noble ambition was. A woman who was proud of her state and proud of her heritage moved into the county and lived there a while. Her ambition was to make love with at least one man from each and every county in the state. It was her way of making men happy. I thought her ambition was a noble ambition. I asked my teacher if her ambition was a noble ambition. He said he did not think so. A man bought the mountain where I used to go to study the wonders of nature, and where I used to go to study the wonders of the sun and the moon and the stars, and where I used to take girls to chase through the woods and lie on the moss with. The man chopped down all the trees which were six inches or more in diameter and sold them for lumber. He ripped off the top of the mountain and built a road up the side of the mountain. Then he built a motel and nightclub on top of the mountain where men could take women and get drunk in the dark barroom and then take the women to the motel and sleep with them. I asked my teacher if the man's ambition was a noble ambition. He said he thought so.

27

I met a girl with light brown hair and dark brown eyes. Her lips were soft and sweet. I asked the girl to marry me. The girl said she would marry me. We planned to be married in June. One time the neighbor's son who I grew up with came home for a visit. He had been away for a year working in the city. He stopped to see me and to show me his new car. I introduced him to the girl I was to marry. That night he got her pregnant.

28

I sat alone in a barroom drinking a beer. I stared at a woman but I was not aware that I stared at her. After a while the man who sat with the woman got up and walked over to me and hit me. "Stop looking at my woman," he said.

29

I told my parents I was going away. My father took me out into a new-plowed field and had me to pick up a handful of new-plowed earth. He said, "This is where your roots are. It's part of you. Run it through your fingers. Feel it. Don't you ever forget the feel of the land you were born on." I crumbled the earth with my hand. It felt soft and smooth.

30

I saw a sign outside a building. Uncle Sam stared at me with fierce eyes and pointed a finger at me. The sign said, "Uncle

Sam wants you." I went into the building. Uncle Sam did not want me. As I passed the sign outside the building, Uncle Sam pointed a finger at me again. I pointed a finger, too.

31

I caught a bus for the city. The city was a strange place. I lived in the city for three years and saw thousands and thousands of people but no one ever saw me. People rushed here and people rushed there but no one ever saw me. The city was a strange place.

32

I got a job in the city. It was a good job. Every Monday morning, when the alarm went off, I pushed a button, and every day for five days I worked at my job. On Friday, I got paid, and Friday night, I got drunk. I stayed drunk on Saturday and always had a hangover on Sunday. It was ding-a-ling-ling, push a button, work five days, thank you sir, set 'em up Joe, oh my head, and ding-a-ling-ling again. It was an almost perfect job.

33

One day the boss slapped me on the back and told me what a good job I was doing. He said, "You are my hardest worker and my most productive worker." I asked my boss why, if I was his hardest worker and his most productive worker, I did not get as many raises as my coworkers. He said, "You are not a good team player." I left the game.

34

A soldier walked up to me on the street one day and asked me to buy him a bottle of whiskey. He had the money in his hand to buy the whiskey with. I asked him why he did not buy the whiskey himself. He said, "I'm an Indian."

35

I sat in a barroom, drinking a beer. One side of the barroom folded back leaving the side open to the street. I sat just inside where it was cool and drank my beer and looked out at the hot sunny street. Two dirty-faced boys ran into the barroom and asked me if they could shine my shoes for a nickel apiece. The bartender chased the boys away before I could answer. He said, "I hate these dirty little greasers." When the bartender turned his back, the two dirty-faced boys scurried under my table. One pulled on my pant leg and grinned at me from under the table. His teeth were clean and white. There were three quarters on the table beside the glass of beer. The quarters were new and shiny. They were all the money I had left in the world. I gave each of the boys a quarter. Then I drank another beer.

36

One summer it got so hot, a farmer I knew swore his hens lay hard-boiled eggs.

37

Once I saw a starving baby. The skin on its head was stretched tight against its skull, but the skin on its arms lay in loose folds on the fat arms of its mother.

38

On the outskirts of a town where I stopped at a service station to fill up with gasoline, I saw a group of men who were gathered in the middle of the highway. On one side of the highway, in the ditch, a man's body lay without a head. On the other side of the highway, in the ditch, a man's head lay with its eyes opened wide staring at me and its mouth opened wide as if it had something it wanted to say to me. An old man hobbled up to the side of the car and looked in at me for a moment. He said, "If I was you, I wouldn't stay in this town."

39

I watched a farmer as he mowed a field of grass which he planned to bail for hay. As I watched the farmer mow, I saw a bird run nervously to and fro in front of the mowing blade. The bird worked its beak as if it were protesting. The farmer was looking in a different direction from the bird and he did not see the bird. The noise of the machine was so great, the farmer would not have heard even if the bird were protesting. As the mowing blade approached it, the bird did not attempt to fly away. The bird ran to and fro in front of the blade until the blade mowed it down. When the feathers and the grass fell away, I saw three eggs in a nest on the ground.

40

One night I had a dream. I dreamed I was running through the meadows and the woods where I used to play, and I dreamed I smelled wild flowers and honeysuckle, and I dreamed I picked up a handful of new-plowed earth and felt its texture with my fingers. When I awoke I was sweating and I was homesick. I wanted to go home.

41

I saw a cactus standing alone on the desert.

42

I saw the wind bending the trees on the plains.

43

I saw a big truck coming at me and I swerved to get out of its way.

44

I saw an old man on a street corner. His back was bent and the hands on his cane were gnarled with age. His family gathered around him and helped him to cross the street.

45

I saw the mountains through the windshield. Dark clouds

hung over them.

46

One day I rounded a curve in the highway and I saw the valley where my home was. A wave of joy swept over me.

47

When I got to where my home was, it was missing. My brother was missing. My father was missing. My mother was missing. My home was missing.

48

A man told me, my brother got killed in the war. He told me, my father grew hard like the land on which he had worked so long and so hard, that my father left my mother alone and went out and became part of the land. He told me, my mother waited a long time for my father to come home, that after a while my mother grew tired of waiting for my father and she went out to look for him and she found him. He told me, the house in which I was born got tired of standing alone on the hillside and it fell down and slid to the bottom of the hill and became part of the land too.

49

Alone, I stood on the land where my roots were and I picked up a handful of earth and felt its texture. It was soft and smooth like the insides of a woman's thighs.

50

Mother

51

I asked a man where home is. He said, "Home is where the heart is." I felt my heart and it was beating. I looked inside of me, but I saw no home waiting for me there.

52

I asked another man where home is. He said, "Home is where you hang your hat." I had no hat.



53
I asked a woman where home is. She said, "Home is where you feel you're wanted."

54
A man I knew and thought of as a friend got married and moved to a distant city. He begged me before he left to come and see him sometime. I drove five hundred miles to see him. On the outskirts of the city I stopped and called him from a telephone booth and told him I had come to see him. He said, "My wife and I have something planned for tonight. Let's make it some other time." We never did.

55
In a restaurant, while I was eating a steak, I overheard a cowboy tell his companions, "A man can count his friends on the fingers of one hand." He counted his fingers. "One, two, three, four, five." He counted his thumb. "He can count himself lucky if he has just one." He held up his thumb. I looked at my hand under the table. I closed my finger around my thumb to hide it from my sight.

56
One day I met a young woman with yellow hair and blue eyes. The young woman smiled at me and when she smiled her face opened up like a wild flower. I touched her and she was soft and warm. Then I looked into her eyes and through her eyes and I saw beauty. I knew somehow I would have to be with her.

57
I asked the young woman what her name was. She said, "Malinda." It sounded as soft and it tasted as sweet as a day in springtime.

58
I asked Malinda if she would go with me and help me find a home. I told Malinda if she did not go with me and help me find a home that I would die. I looked into her eyes and I knew Malinda knew if she did not go with me and help me find a home that I would die. She went with me.

59
Together we went to find a home and we became as one.

60
We sat on the bank of a mountain stream with our feet in the water, and her hand was soft and warm in my hand. The sun on the water sparkled like Malinda's eyes. The sound of the water as it trickled over the rocks was like the sound of Malinda's laughter. And her hand was soft and warm in my hand.

61
We ran through the fields and laughed as we sprawled on the green grass, and her body was soft and warm against my body.

62
Malinda was beauty. Malinda was light. Malinda was softness. Malinda was warmth.

63
Malinda

64
One day storm clouds moved in quickly and it began to rain. Every day for seven straight days, I stood in the cold rain on one side of the road and watched the sun shine on the other side. On the eighth day, I walked across the road and waited for the sun to shine. It never did.

65
Malinda died. She did not tell me she was going to die. She did not tell me why she was going to die. Malinda just died.

66
Midnight, on a deserted street, I stood on a brightly lighted corner and looked into the darkness. I saw no one.

67
Why?

68
On an unfamiliar road in a strange country, I stood on a bridge and looked at the water below me. The water was crystal clear, and I could see the fish as they swam below the surface of the water. Suddenly the water whispered to me. I thought I heard it call my name. I ran and stumbled and slid down the bank until I reached the water. I put my hand in the water. It was soft and warm.

69
I struggled to reach the top of a mountain. The load I carried was too heavy. I got down on my hands and knees and crawled and clawed my way to the top of the mountain. When I got to the top, I was bleeding. I staggered to my feet and stumbled to the edge of a precipice. The precipice fell sharply to the bottom of a deep gorge. I looked into the gorge and saw a ribbon of blue water. I could not see the bottom of the blue water. I was glad I could not see the bottom of the water. I was afraid of bottoms.

70
Malinda. Why?

71
I stood at the edge of the precipice and looked at the ribbon of blue water and wondered what was at the bottom. My load was too heavy and I longed to lay it down.

72
"Malinda! Malinda! Malinda! Help me!"

73
I felt a warm breath at my neck. When I looked behind me, I saw a young woman with yellow hair and blue eyes. She smiled at me and her smile warmed me. Suddenly my load grew as light as a feather and blew away on her breath.

74
The young woman took my hand and led me away from the precipice. Her hand was soft and warm. She took me to a cabin in the mountains and she tended my wounds and she nursed me. When she thought I was well again, she turned me loose to test my wings. I pretended I could fly.

75
I went straight to the top of a mountain, and I perched on the highest peak and looked up at the sky. The sky was so clear and blue, I wanted to dive off into it and soar around for a while. Then I looked below me and I saw a brownish gray cloud that stretched as far as I could see. For forty days and forty nights I perched on the top of the mountain and waited for the cloud to blow away. It never did. I would have stayed on the top of the mountain for a while longer, but on the forty-first day, a cold wind came up the mountain and blew me away.

76
A hot August wind blew across the desert. The wind blew strong and it teared my eyes. I stood in the wind and watched a snake in the mouth of a cave. The snake struggled to crawl out of the cave into the sunlight. After a while the snake ceased its struggle and crawled into a circle and began to swallow its own tail. As it swallowed more and more of its own tail, the snake got smaller and smaller. Finally it turned into an egg. I reached into the cave and picked up the egg. It was as cold as ice. I carried the egg and laid it on a rock in the sun. Moisture

beaded on the shell of the egg, but the hot August wind quickly dried the moisture. As I stood there watching the egg, the sun got hotter and the wind blew stronger, and I could feel my skin shrink as it dried from the heat. After a while a hole popped in the side of the egg shell. A baby snake stuck its head out through the hole and looked around. When the baby snake saw me, it jerked its head back inside the egg shell, but I could see its eyes watching me through the hole. Suddenly a cold chill washed over me. Its eyes looked dark. Its eyes looked cold. Its eyes looked hard. I turned quickly away, for I smelled the cold in the wind.

77
God

78
I met an old man in the desert. He had spent his entire life studying the religions of man. I asked the old man if he believed in God. He said, "Just which God are we talking about now?"

79
I asked a philosopher if God exists. He said, "Yes, and I can prove it." I asked the philosopher the nature of God. He said, "God is all-seeing, all-knowing, and all-powerful." I asked the philosopher if reincarnation took place. He said, "No, and I can prove it." I asked the philosopher if he could read the mind of God. He did not answer.

80
I met an old man who had been every place and had done everything. I asked the old man if he was afraid of death. He said, "No, death may be the ultimate pleasure and I wouldn't want to miss it."

81
One morning I awoke and discovered something missing. I did not know what was missing, but I discovered an emptiness inside of me, and I started back to where my roots were.

82
One night in a parking lot outside a nightclub, as I started to get into my sports car, two young women drove up and parked their car in the parking space beside my sports car. One of the young women asked me if my car would hold three. I told her yes but one would have to straddle my stick. The young women looked at each other and walked away. Then one turned her head and looked back at me. She said, "Fuck you." I asked her how much. She did not answer.

83
I met a woman in the town near the place I was born. She told me she thought I would make a good father. She had two young children and no husband. One night she whispered in my ear that she would like to have my baby. She said, "I wonder what it would look like." I told her I was willing to help her find out what the baby would look like. She said, "First we will have to be married." I told her that getting married was a lot of bother just to find out what a baby would look like. She never mentioned the baby again.

84
I met an old man who lived alone on a farm. One day I went to visit the old man. He said, "Everyone thinks I'm crazy. The people in town think I'm crazy. My family thinks I'm crazy. Maybe I am. I was born on this place, I spent all my life on this place, and I intend to die on this place. Do you see that bare place, yonder on the hillside. I ain't never been able to get anything to grow there, but that's where I want to be buried

when I die. My family thinks I'm crazy, but I think the dead should be free to do their duty to the living, and I want to be buried there with nothing more than a sheet around me and a seed in each of my hands." The old man looked off into the distance. "I'd like to be buried with a peach seed in each hand." He smiled. "I always was partial to Georgia peaches." He was a crazy old man.

85
The other day I met a young woman on the street. She had a doll face. She had doll eyes. She was painted like a doll, and I wanted to know if her skin had the feel of a doll's skin. I asked the young woman if I could feel her. She said, "Get the hell away from me, you dirty old son-of-a-bitch." I saw something in her eyes, and it chilled me, for it was dark and it was cold and it was hard.

86
A few days later I saw the same thing in the eyes of another young woman, and it was dark and it was cold and it was hard.

87
This morning when I awoke the sun was shining. I got up and looked out my windows. The sun was shining so bright that it hurt my eyes to look at it, but I could not stop myself from looking at the sun, even though it hurt my eyes to look at it.

88
I went out to the old home place and waded through the confusion of tangled weeds and underbrush to the site where the house once stood. I picked up a handful of earth and felt its texture with my fingers.

89
Father

90
I stood there with the earth in my hand and looked into the sunlight and through the sunlight and I saw something. It was dark and it was cold and it was hard. When I saw it, something tore loose inside me. It hurt then. It hurt something awful.

91
"Father! Mother! God! Malinda!"

92
I looked at the red and gold leaves on the maple tree. Then a movement caught my eyes, and in the dark hollow place at the base of the maple tree, I saw a snake. It was already in a circle with its tail in its mouth.

93
As I looked at the snake, something came into my mind for one brief moment. Then I knew . . .

94
Father. Mother. God. Malinda.

95
Now I know it is out there somewhere, and it is dark and it is cold and it is hard, and there is no place I can run to escape it, even if I wanted to escape it.

96
Father, Mother, God, Malinda.

97
Now I know that it is out there coming for me, and God! how I wait for it to come. For when I looked out my windows this morning, I saw winter coming on.

98
Father Mother God Malinda I

99
The end.

Voices from Africa

The Poetry of Common Speech

ALL ONE WAY

The past is
dog gone like
a dead canine
with his
tail turned over

That dumb dog
is dead

He don't bark
at me
one time more

But neither do
he sniff out
a young bush pig
hid out in
high bush

Neither way
is all
one way

IT HAS BEEN NOTED

It has been said
of the young teacher of pupils
that he does not know
a yam from a vagina

But it has been noted
that he has not yet attempted
to fornicate with a yam
even in the outermost field

Transcribed and Arranged by Judson Crews

CANED

I broke out of
one kind of prison
on a parched field
in the high sun

I walked out
like a natural hero
little Sis clasping my hand
dragging me back

To school, to school, I said
like a natural hero
till I was squashed in
a squatter compound

Stinking and bleeding
under the tight heat
in raucous, numb streets
in crazy, break down shanties

I cannot break out now
shame dragging me under
this rotten burden
knowing failure like fire

Strokes, breaking my skin
searing my sinews, knowing
I cannot rise up, I am
beaten lying down

THAT ONE

That girl
I meet and like most
in one single instant

Her dark body strong
and contentious
as the Zambezi river
in late March
when the moon is
nearly turning

Her eyes are twisting
shadows in
rain soaked bush

You don't know
for one minute
which way you better
guess or look out

Her smooth glistening skin

But you think
maybe
there may be
an ancient alligator
somehow

Inside

THE RIGHTS OF CIRCUMCISION

The mysteries which
I learned—the blood will
finally stop, the pain
finally stops

Two stripes branded
under my left rib—the mystery
of the salamander, the mystery
of incestuous love

WHAT I BELIEVE

How does anybody say it
what you really believe
—the heart of anything
is in its heart

The heart of an egg
is in the heart of it
and the heart of a tree
is in the tree's heart

The tree heart will be
in the heart of a drum
when you make a drum
out of a tree

Or in the heart of a boat
when you make it a boat
out of a big tree

The heart of a lion
is in my heart when
I eat the lion

I do not eat a hyena
I do not eat a mouse

BELLY OF HUNGER

They way it will swell
and swell like a hungry
belly of dry sand
and no rain

This is the womb
we will come back to
fighting to make
our known home our own

I remember the green
in the early season
I remember the green
deep in the late

But I fought in a
sand desert without rain
and it swells and swells
like a belly of hunger

The True Mark of Humanity

WHEN WE HAD COWS

A few goats, a number of cows
and a few wives
I was told about this
in my young days

I listened without asking
many questions, my awe
straight and upright
like once-on-a-time spears

They said it was when
the water rose early
and remained high
in a long season

I started to say to my sons
about it too, when I say shit
I have no cows, a lame goat
—my wife sweeps hotel rooms

TOWN GIRL

She some angel
with her tweezer eyebrows
why she got her
scaley thumb in my bill-fold
she better keep
her toenail out of
my fly

These poems are intense, lyrical fragments of everyday speech of black Africans. They were gleaned from taped speech recorded in the swim of life-in the public markets, in the streets, at the fairgrounds—in Lusaka, the capital of Zambia in West Africa. The poems were transcribed and arranged by Judson Crews. According to Crews, the poems are not intended to represent methodical anthropological research; he stresses that his methods and goals are not technical but human.

Judson Crews began publishing his poetry in the United States during the mid-1930s. His work has appeared in Poetry and Wormwood Review as well as a hundred other little magazines. In addition to teaching sociology and psychology, Crews has worked in community mental health and social programs. Currently he is teaching social work in an undergraduate program at UNZA in Lusaka.

Crews' first experience in taping and transcribing speech came in the 1950s when he and a colleague taped conversations with Patrocínio Barela, a Spanish American wood-carver. In 1971, Crews taped and transcribed similar material with Charley John Greasybear, a Navaho Indian. Some of those poems have appeared in Prairie Schooner and South Dakota Review.

In transcribing the poetry of everyday Zambian speech, Crews explains:

"Every respondent knew he was talking into a microphone. Some thought it was for radio, though I think I succeeded in disavowing that impression. On the inspiration of Sekou Toure, that the genius of African art is its quality of folk anonymity, I decided in advance that I would use material only from respondents in agreement with this principle.

"Through my fault of language limitation, all interviews were necessarily conducted in English, and no one is more acutely aware than I am of the limitations this created in terms of the breadth and richness of the results. In a future incarnation maybe I will be a philologist instead of a social worker.

"What kinds of questions did I ask? The clearest answer is no kind at all. The interviews were kinetic, fluid, structured if at all by the respondent himself. Of course, I did ask questions, but in no sort of programmed way. The most persistent question was, as in therapy sessions, How was it? What was it like? How did you feel about it?

"My special work with this material is knowing what to leave out—and generally I leave out about 27 to 28 minutes of a 30-minute tape. Certainly there is no other person who would make exactly the same decisions I made.

"I did have a certain confidence that I would find a real kind of poetry hidden in the speech and thought of even the most anonymous among us. A major reward was to be reassured, all over again, that uniqueness, not commonness is the true mark of humanity, whether in Africa or anywhere on earth."

In the Next Issue

The Winter, 1976 issue of NEXUS will explore the Vietnam experience and how it is affecting American Society. NEXUS needs relevant poetry, fiction, essays, articles, and graphics. If you're a Vietnam vet or a war resister or simply someone with ideas to share about the war experience, contact: NEXUS, Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio 45431.

In addition to the Vietnam section there will be other work by WSU writers and artists.

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